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# Books in General By Solomon Eagle

*S.C. Squier*

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**TO  
MAURICE HEWLETT**

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## Preface

**T**HIS is the third and last selection from the papers contributed weekly to the *New Statesman* from its foundation in April, 1913, until January, 1920. One or two odd articles, published over my other name, that seemed to be akin to them are to be found amongst them. I have not made elaborate alterations to give them a false air of having been written yesterday. One at least, the article on John Clare, might have been altered very considerably owing to the recent discovery of many "new" poems by him.

S. E.





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## Dedications

ONE of the most amusing and exciting of the minor works produced by the war was a book called *Outwitting the Hun*, by a young airman who escaped from Germany. There was one odd feature of this very odd book which escaped general notice, viz., the dedication. The author travelled entirely by night without a compass, steering entirely by the heavens. The result is the following dedication :

“ To

“ THE NORTH STAR,

“ whose guiding light marked the pathway to freedom for a weary fugitive, this book is inscribed in humble gratitude and abiding faith.”

It was a very amiable impulse that led him to this expression of his gratitude ; it is certainly hard to imagine that he will be able to repay the Pole Star in any other way. It is probably the first time that a star has been thus addressed on a dedication-leaf ; in ordinary circumstances it would no more occur to an author to lay his offerings at the

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feet of the North Star than it would occur to him to protest his devotion to the North Pole. At the same time, on this author's principles, there are circumstances which might justify dedications to the Equator, the Tropic of Capricorn, the Gulf Stream, the Old Red Sandstone, and the evaluation of  $\pi$ . In other words, if the gallant airman's example is freely copied, we are in for some rather fantastic excesses. One owes more than one can say to all sorts of things which one rarely remembers. Had the Ice Age not passed away, I should not be here now; how immense, therefore, is my debt to the Ice Age! How can I signalise what I feel about that considerate retreat better than by dedicating to that epoch so glacial without, but evidently so warm at heart, a book of which it might truthfully be said that: But For Your Far-seeing and Self-effacing Action, etc., etc.?

It is not very often people break forth into these novel dedications. One of the most original—and yet obvious—I know was done by George Wither, who dedicated a book to himself. This was *Abuses Stript and Whipt* (1613). It was his first book, and he was only twenty-three years of age. He had no reputation, and few friends, so he cheered himself up by writing himself a dedication of nine pages, beginning thus: "To him-selfe, G. W. wisheth all happiness." He begins:



## Dedications

“Thou (even my selfe) whome next God, my Prince, and Country I am most engaged unto ; It is not unlikelie but some will wonder why, contrary to the world's custome, I have made choyse of thy Patronage for this booke, rather than the protection of such whose mightinesse might seeme better able to defend it.”

He then gives his reasons. The first is : “I could not amongst all men finde any man, in my opinion, so fitting for this purpose, but either my Worke was unworthy, or too worthie his Patronage.” He catalogues the other reasons, fifthly, sixthly, etc., and at the end finishes in style with :

“But because I begin to grow tedious to my owne-selfe, and since I shall have Opportunity enough to consider with thee what is further needfull without an Epistle, with my prayers for my Prince, my Country, my friends, and my own prosperitie, without any leave taking or Commendation of my Selfe ; I heartily wish my owne Soule to fare-well.”

If almost any other author had dedicated a book to himself, he would have fallen into an unpleasing self-consciousness and produced an effect of showing-off ; but Wither's genuineness, courage, and certainty that it was his duty to reform the world make the whole performance charming. He says that he is

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in need of all the exhortation he can give himself, and he doubts if his free speech would make "a Diapason, pleasing to the eare of a common Mecaenas."

The "common Mecaenas" got some pretty good "diapasons" in his day. The best I have ever struck—I have forgotten the reference—was that of an eighteenth-century writer who told his rich patron that he united the best qualities of Dives and of Lazarus. The dedications to Charles II. frequently verge on the blasphemous; they began early when Charles was in the cradle. Francis Quarles inscribed his *Divine Fancies* to the "Sweet Babe"; in a postscript addressed to Charles' governess, Lady Dorset (we make here a metaphorical approach to the airman's dedication), he says :

"Most excellent Lady,

"You are the Star which stands over the Place where the Babe lies; By whose directions light, I come from the East, to present my Myrrh and Frankincense to the young Child; Let not our Royal JOSEPH, nor his Princely MARY be afraid; there are no Herods here; We have all seen his Star in the East, and have rejoyced; Our loyall hearts are full; for our eyes have seen him, in whom our Posterity shall be blessed."

This, I repeat, was Charles II. The habit of

## Dedications

dedication has died out, and it is a pity. We can spare the fulsome dedication ; we have no desire to see young novelists comparing, say, Sir Alfred Mond or the Duke of Rutland to Homer, Cræsus, Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Napoleon, and St. Francis, in order to get a possible five pounds out of them. But it is a pity that our sheepishness should have led us to truncate our affectionate dedications to bald names with "To" in front of them. One would not willingly spare the dedication inscribed "With all a brother's fondness . . . to Mary Anne Lamb, the author's best friend and sister," by Charles Lamb, the year after the tragedy in the family. And there is no savour of servility about Caxton's commendation of the *Morte d'Arthur* to "all noble lords and ladies, with all other estates, of what estate or degree they be of." "Therein," he says in accents which we have lost, "may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue, and sin. Do after the good and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renown."

Let us hope the habit will revive. But there is one kind of dedication which we can well spare, although it is the most fascinating of all. The most interesting dedication in the language has no literary merits, and is ambiguous ; we do not know for a certainty

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to whom it was written, or why. I refer to :

TO THE ONLIE BEGETTER OF  
THESE ENSUING SONNETS,  
MR. W. H., ALL HAPPINESSE  
AND THAT ETERNITY

PROMISED

BY

OUR EVER-LIVING POET  
WISHETH

THE WELL-WISHING

ADVENTURER IN

SETTING

FORTH

T. T.

A few more dedications of this sort would be enough to drive the critical world mad, and to keep it mad in perpetuity.

## The Beauty of Football

I WENT—we shall come to literature presently—to the University match at Queen's Club. It was, as the papers all said, a magnificent game. There were few outstanding players, and the outsides were unoriginal: their movements were of the mechanical and expected kind, there was no Poulton among them. But there was little



## The Beauty of Football

muffing, the pace was hard from start to finish, and both packs shoved, swarmed and pelted for all they were worth. Smallwood's dropped goal that decided the match was a beauty, done in a flash; there was an even more thrilling moment when Jenkins of Oxford in the first half had a go and, amid silence, the ball sailed on, hit the cross-bar with a bang, and rebounded into the field: which was very hard luck. Saxon, the fastest of the Cambridge three-quarters, was starved; had he had more chances the score would have been larger.

But come, come; this is not my job. I can leave it to the experts who say that the Oxonians gallantly stemmed a series of desperate rushes by the forwards from the Cam, and that the leather was neatly transferred to the Dark Blue wing who but for something or other would have notched a try. But it is difficult once one has got on to such a subject to avoid darting off into emphatic assertions: every one of the thousands of spectators (except perhaps the lady behind me who asked why the goalkeepers didn't stay in their goals) probably left with the conviction that he and he alone could give an exactly just account of the game (or such part of it as the mist allowed him to see) and could prove conclusively either (a) that the better side won or (b) that the better side

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lost. The point is this. Before the game started I stood for one hour on a wet plank elevated some stages from the ground. The wait was something tedious. I had brought no newspaper with me to read, and had I done so I should probably have emulated several neighbours and stood on it to keep my feet warm. Craning one's neck round to see the people swarming in was a diversion that palled. The remark to one's companion that these games were nearly always begun in semi-fog and finished in darkness, could only be made, with impunity, three or four times. Counting the clergymen had to be given up as they would move about and vitiate the statistics. But at last into an empty mind strayed a thought that long ago had been there before. I wondered why it was that nobody had ever made literature out of one of these matches, or indeed (so far as I am aware) out of any football match, even of the inferior and more popular species.

There is plenty of cricket literature, including some good poetry. Hunting has a library of fiction to itself; and hundreds of songs. This very year Mr. Masefield has produced in *Reynard the Fox* one of the best of modern narrative poems. It gives the whole hunting scene: the field, the pack, the landscape, the fox, the long chase, the ride home under the moon. A good football match on a good day,

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## The Beauty of Football

with a big crowd and great excitement about the result, would make an equally fine and moving subject for a poem, or for fine descriptive prose. I thought of it intermittently on Tuesday: the whole thing was a pageant and a battle of extraordinary beauty. There might be difficulty about a hero. It was observed that Mr. Masfield's poem did not really get moving until he reached his individual hero, the fox. A centre of interest is wanted; however stirring the general scene it is difficult to make it more than a background. The poet of a football match would, I imagine, have to select a three-quarter and very probably a wing three-quarter as the person whose fortunes he should, in the first place, follow. The limelight could not very well be kept on a forward who spends most of his time head downwards in the scrum or flat on the ground with a half a dozen others on top of him. The full-back—though I did once see one score—is out of court as too purely defensive; and the halves, though usually the busiest and, on the whole, the most important members of a side, do not get as a rule such chances of doing the really spectacular things that are done by the three-quarters of genius such as Poulton, Raphael, and L. M. Macleod. At best the hero would be a difficulty. Your fox is the natural centre of interest throughout a hunt. Your batsman can keep his end up throughout an

## Books in General

innings, make two-thirds of the score himself, and, at a stretch, proceed then to clean bowl (I am talking about heroes of literature) the whole of the opposite side. But no man could hope to attain verisimilitude if he gave a footballing hero possession of the ball for the greater part of a match; at best the most prodigious of three-quarters must spend most of his time on the watch, and especially so in a very even game, the only sort of game which would be worth heroic treatment.

There is the great technical difficulty. But there is much obvious material ready to hand: the ever-thickening crowd and its noises, the growing excitement as the start approaches, streaming and clustering forwards, tussles near the line with a multitude yelling itself hoarse, all the sprinting, kicking, tackling: scores and the hush that awaits the kicks at goal: all the sway and rush of thirty men in a green area with massed faces girdling it; the grey blank sky, the mute houses all round. The mist deepens away, and in the far corner nothing can be seen when the play goes there but flitting phantoms whose every movement produces a roar from the strange unseen unknown crowd in that distance, now glorying that they have robbed all the other crowds around the enclosure of the near view. Steam rises from the sweating scrums; smoke from the crowds; as evening draws



## The Deeps of Time

in the grey on the opposite side is pierced by countless little flames of matches; there are always two or three alight. Excitement grows and grows till the roar is continuous. One side struggles and struggles to get over; and then, suddenly, the great emotional structure is suddenly broken. The whistle has gone. All the crowds disintegrate. They pour away, and in an hour nothing inhabits the ground but ghosts.

## The Deeps of Time

I HAVE been reading the first part of Mr. H. G. Wells's *The Outline of History*, with a horrible ape-like creature on the cover from whom I am indeed sorry to be descended. The work is being issued in fortnightly parts; it is written for fortnightly parts; the instalment ends thrillingly, like an instalment of a serial, with man, the hero, about to enter a stage already busy and exciting; every paragraph is written simply so that a child or a man of letters might understand it; colossal stories and speculations are summarised in a sentence; the very learned may have nothing to learn from it. Possibly, too, not all the theories adopted are up to date. But the unscientific reader who surrenders himself to it will find it the

## Books in General

clearest and most stimulating summary of the earth's history extant; and even a man familiar with all Mr. Wells's facts might find his vision clarified by it. It is like a film recording hundreds of millions of years, now rattling past one with inconceivable rapidity, now clicking to a stop to show us a vivid picture of what we have arrived at. Whether Mr. Wells's later chapters, in which he is to sketch what to the geologist is the hour's adventure of the remarkable race that produced Mr. Wells and ourselves, will be up to the level of these remains to be seen. All sorts of considerations will come in that may produce differences of opinion; the importance you give to events and movements among mankind depends (if I may thus swallow my own tail) on the importance you attach to them. But if Mr. Wells keeps up to his first level, he will, whether we share his outlook or not, have produced a masterpiece of summarisation and popularisation. I remember German *Philosophies of History*, and think that, after all, we can do some things better than our grandfathers.

Mr. Wells's first section on the making of our world is very well done. He avoids contentious remarks on the origins of life; dismissing the greatest of all problems with the remark that non-living things "do not move of their own accord." The phrase,

## The Depths of Time

however, in its setting does shock one into reflection; and one has barely left it when one is thrown upon the fact (not new but never losing its awfulness) that every individual is unique and that "that is true of all the minute creatures that swarmed and reproduced in the Archaeozoic and Protozoic, seas as it is of men to-day." An admirable chapter on astronomy and climate lead to a truly terrifying one, freely illustrated with pictures of real skeletons and conjectural beasts, on the dragons of the slime. Horrible as they are, I find personally something more horrible still in the early insects: "There were numerous dragon flies—one found in the Belgian coal measures had a wing span of twenty-nine inches. There were also a great variety of flying cockroaches." The reptiles die; some climatic change beats them; millions of years pass; and then early man appears. Page one gave us a flaming fragment shot out from the sun; page fifty or so will bring us to the caves of the Auvergne, where hairy men drew pictures of deer on the rocks as well as they could.

Sprinkled here and there are sentences like windows opening on to things too stupendous to think about. "There will be a time," remarks Mr. Wells, "when the day will be as long as a year is now, and the cooling sun, shorn of its beams, will hang

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motionless in the heavens." "Not only is Space from the point of view of life and humanity empty, but Time is empty also. Life is like a little glow, scarcely kindled yet, in these void immensities." But the future is all before us and Mr. Wells has, probably to an unparalleled extent, a passion for the future, the remote future of the race. "Arthur Balfour," wrote George Wyndham in explaining that statesman's attitude towards life, "knows that there has been one Ice Age and thinks there is going to be another." So does Mr. Wells; but he seems to like the idea. Man, if he really shows himself efficient and enterprising (he will have to change a little if he is to make plans thousands of years ahead!) may foresee the change and prepare to meet it. He may be able to control climate, moreover. And he may evolve so as to overcome all sorts of difficulties new and old :

"To-day, though we mark how life and man are still limited to five miles of air and a depth of perhaps a mile or so of sea, we must not conclude from that present limitation that life, through man, may not presently spread out and up and down to a range of living as yet inconceivable."

Possibly man will become extinct; possibly, as Mr. Wells appears to suggest, he will learn



## The Deeps of Time

to migrate across space, or live without air, after heat has gone from the world. It is even, I suppose, conceivable that conditions might arise which would make him evolve backwards. All knowledge is interesting and all speculation; but it is only a rare mind that can contemplate this sort of vista in a sustained way, and a very rare character indeed that can feel ardently engaged about the difficulties and stratagems of our descendants millions of years hence.

For me, on my first recoil from these fascinating chapters, I wanted to catch hold of a chair, to light a pipe, to have a drink, to go and talk to a friend about Charles Coborn's farewell performance. I felt cold. And I know that whatever my curiosity may learn about the far future and the far past will only make all the dearer the little lit patch that we know. It is interesting to think of the superman as it is of the amoeba; we look at them as we look at the remarkable specimens in the Zoo; these are things that Nature produces over aeons. But even if I admit that they are relatives I really cannot feel a family attachment to them. The affections that centre on a country, on certain landscapes and people, on trees, flowers and weathers that we know, will not stray into those cold distances. We cannot love beings so out of contact with us; and we never

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work properly for anything that we do not love. For the near future it is very well. England will be here and men will read Shakespeare; our speech, however, transformed, will be here; the things we were fond of will move others; they will share our hopes and our griefs. But millions of years hence! Those foreigners, so bald and goggle-eyed, perhaps, or equipped with wings or fins or trunks or ten legs apiece or God knows what: they are not what we call Man. Man is to us a being historic; neither pre-historic nor post-historic. And, anyhow, a million years hence they will not care about us.

As I write I observe once more that a live dinosaur is rumoured in the marshes of Central Africa! A mammal might be all right; but not a dinosaur. How that creature, if alive, will mess up all these historians of the earth. I hope he is there. If he is Dr. Einstein should go over and shake hands with him.

## Swinburne's Defects

THE new selected volume of Swinburne's poems has appeared. The selection has been made by Mr. Gosse and Mr. Thomas J. Wise, the well-

## Swinburne's Defects

known bibliophile, who bought from Watts-Dunton, for a very large price, many of the MSS. that Swinburne left. It is introduced by a note which has a certain sub-flavour of irony: "The only selection from the poems of Swinburne hitherto available in England was one made by Watts-Dunton in 1887. It consisted of pieces that appealed especially to his personal taste, and omitted many that have been recognised as among the best the poet ever wrote. It was not broadly characteristic of Swinburne's many moods and variety of subjects, and it gave an impression of the nature of his genius which criticism has not confirmed."

The new selection is certainly better than the old; in fact, about as good as a selection could be. I should imagine that any man of taste would find all his favourite poems in it; on the fringe there is bound to be some difference of opinion. The book is drawn from all periods; the choruses from *Atalanta* are extracted; and amongst a large number of poems which were missing in the other selection I notice two of the imitation (very good imitation) Border Ballads that were first published the year before last. *Lord Soullis* was the best of them, and it is here. But I am not sure that it ought to be. It is serious parody, and though one admires its brilliance as a *tour-de-force* one would scarcely put it

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among the best that Swinburne wrote. Possibly the idea was to represent the diversity of his talent as well as the authenticity of his genius. For me I am quite content to read Swinburne's shorter poems in a selection; and, going through this book, I find that I could do with a selection still shorter. If one is looking only for the quintessence he reduces and reduces. Yet, differ as men may about the volume of his good work, its quality is beyond dispute. Had he left nothing behind him but *Atalanta*, his position would have been assured and high. Less than that would have been necessary; *Ave atque Vale*, the elegy on Baudelaire, would alone have been enough to give him the name of a great poet. Printed and reprinted as it has been it has never yet been done full critical justice. Its tone and temper were dictated by its subject; Baudelaire could not be expected to inspire a poem as exalted in spirit as *Adonais*. But *Ave atque Vale* is emotionally as genuine and powerful as *Adonais*; its form is as good; its detail is as good; and its languid music is as perfect in its fashion as Shelley's loveliest and most magnificent. The stanza was a marvellous invention; the perfect tube through which just that music should be blown:

*For always thee the fervid languid glories  
Allured of heavier suns in mightier skies,*



## Swinburne's Defects

*Thine ears knew all the wandering watery  
sighs  
Where the sea sobs round Lesbian promontories,  
The barren kiss of piteous wave to wave  
That knows not where is that Leucadian  
grave  
Which hides too deep the supreme head of song.  
Ah, salt and sterile as her kisses were,  
The wild sea winds her and the green gulfs bear  
Hither and thither, and vex and work her wrong,  
Blind gods that cannot spare.*

All his stock words come into this poem ; but in this poem they are not stock words, but used accurately, appropriately. As a matter of fact, many of them came from Baudelaire, and were best used by Swinburne when he was describing Baudelaire's personality and work. Later, they were counters and they all came into anything he wrote, whether it was an ode to the sea or a sonnet on a bad dramatist.

No great poet is so obviously a case for selection. The proportion of "waste" in his complete works is extraordinarily large. No man is good all through. Little, if a critic were separating unmistakable chaff from the grain, could be left out of Milton. There is little that is utterly empty and supererogatory (though he is really first-rate only a quarter of his time) in Browning ; those

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who like him well like him almost everywhere. But the profoundest admirer of Tennyson would not mind if half his works had never been written ; in fact the bad half has damaged and obscured the good half. A sound selection from Keats would include most of him, though many of his poems are only good in places ; Shelley can, for habitual reading, be greatly reduced, and so can Wordsworth and Coleridge. But Swinburne is—I speak for many who I know feel this as I do—an extreme case. For, if one had really gone thoroughly through his works and cut out the small part that one really liked, one would never want to look at the rest again. This scarcely holds of anyone else. I may not habitually read the whole of Wordsworth, but I should be sorry to know that there was any page of his that I should never be *allowed* to look at again. But much of Swinburne need never have been written : he took a nominal subject and, in a rapture of fluent self-imitation, turned the handle of the old magnificent barrel organ rapidly round and round. When you are reading him in anthologies you have a higher opinion of him than at any other time. It is a strange thing ; but the psychological states that lie behind it are by now pretty well understood ; and one need read no more than Mr. Gosse's *Life* and Mrs. Meynell's short essay to know what he was and what happened to him.

## Swinburne's Defects

On looking at the above I find that for the five-and-fiftieth time I have seized the opportunity of arguing that most of Swinburne is rubbish. Why? Unconsciously, I imagine, I have been impelled by the feeling that it is the most dangerously plausible rubbish that exists; that influence exercised by Swinburne is the worst influence, artistically, to which a writer can be subjected; that, in fact, enthusiastic youth should always be warned against him. He was (when not inspired) an extraordinarily clever composer of fakes, the large movement of which conceals the deplorably loose writing; and many have derived from him the conception of verse as merely the accumulation of sweet or sonorous lines and rotund words. He imposed bad artistic habits and a bad vocabulary on a whole generation of minor writers.

And this has left a whole generation of critics, who have suffered from the said generation of minor poets, unjustifiably incensed against him, conscious that they are unjust and yet hardly able to bridle their feelings. There is not in Swinburne, at first sight, much to get angry about or even to dispute about. It is impossible to be agitated one way or the other by any of his opinions. They are not that sort of opinion. And, for the rest, his poems are either good poems or bad: it is even unusually easy to distinguish

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between the good and the bad. Nevertheless, the modern critic reads Swinburne with a desire for expression rising insurgent within him. The cause of this is, I think, that Swinburne's qualities and mannerisms never change. When they are appropriately applied the result is a good poem: otherwise it is a bad poem. Thus ghosts of the bad poems haunt the reader in the best pages that Swinburne ever wrote. You are never once allowed to forget, as Wordsworth lets you forget, how bad a poet he could be, when circumstances conspired to that end. And consequently criticism is for ever teased with the difficulty of making clear how, and explaining why, he could be both so good and so bad. There is, of course, no answer to these momentous questions, and well we know it. Swinburne was made like that; but it will be a long time before we can persuade ourselves calmly to accept the fact, without itching to expound it.

## Why Write a Bad Hand?

**B**Y the same post [there reached me an indecipherable letter from a friend and a book on *Handwriting Reform* by Mr. David Thomas, Director of Education for Carnarvonshire. The collocation was too striking, and I sat down at once to read a



## Why Write a Bad Hand?

book that, in the ordinary way, I might have considered off my beat. It is an interesting little book, and I recommend it to all teachers and parents. It contains diverse information. You may learn from it the reason why left-handed people stammer if they are forced to do things with their right hands; how the Red Indians made themselves expert in the art of carving portraits of Queen Victoria; the number of the Chinese symbols; the development of our alphabet from pictographs; and what songs the Sirens sang. It contains much argument, fully illustrated, concerning the physical effects of various attitudes, and the relative advantages of various attitudes, and the relative advantages of various ways of holding the pen. But the chief "reform" advocated is the adoption of a new style of writing in the schools. The hand traditionally taught has developed from "copperplate" which, as Mr. Thomas reasonably points out, goes directly the opposite way to the script of the copperplate engraver. Children are taught to slope forward, to thicken their down strokes, to join their letters and (to all appearances) to make their letters and words look as like each other as possible. The new style is the oldest style; a style like that of print (which grew out of mediæval MSS.) or that of contemporary "calligraphers." Experiments have proved that children who are taught this style write beautifully in a

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few months, though their old-style fists have been atrocious. It is also believed that, writing vertical print-like letters not joined together, a child can write just as fast as he could in the common way. This is difficult to believe. If one tries to print nicely oneself one takes hours over a page. But one must take a gentleman's word, especially when he backs it up with professional-looking statistics. The new style is easy and rapid for the writer, hygienic from the medical point of view, and productive of pleasure in the reader. What more can one ask? Specimens are given; and they completed a conversion begun by Mr. Thomas's argument.

Having read this book and agreed thoroughly with its conclusions, I considered what next I should do. To have sound principles is better than not to have sound principles; to approve of reform is better than to be obscurantist. I am of that school—ancient, it must be admitted, and widespread—which holds that faith ought to be supplemented by works. It is, theoretically, never too late to mend; it is no good believing a thing if you don't act on it; an ounce of practice is better than a pound of precept. It therefore seemed to me that my duty was to endeavour to reform my own handwriting, of which frequent and not entirely baseless complaint has been made.

## Why Write a Bad Hand?

I set to work systematically. First I made notes on position and discovered (1) that I twist myself as the boy does in the picture where the desk is too high; (2) that I lean my head down to the paper as the boy does where the desk is too low. These things mean round shoulders and curvature of the spine; probably also, as my nose comes too close to the paper, a squint. Any of these maladies alone I might be able to bear, but I do not fancy an accumulation of the lot. I next studied the position of the fingers. My species is that most violently denounced, of which the dominant note is an acutely crooked forefinger with a protruding knuckle. This derives (our authority says) from holding the pen too tightly when young; or possibly from early efforts with a pencil and a slate. Instead of slanting the pen backwards at an angle of  $20^{\circ}$  to the straightforward line, I slope it slightly forward. Finally, as the outcome of this concatenation of gross errors, there is a kind of writing which would certainly not secure Mr. Thomas's commendation. It is not, I comfort myself, the kind of writing for which he reserves his most thorough censure. Nobody has ever said to me "Why do you model your handwriting on that abominable copperplate?" When I read the passages exposing the infamy of copperplate I hold my head up. But if my writing is not like copperplate I must candidly admit that it is still

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less like print. In fact, I cannot think of anything at all that it *is* like.

So I determined to turn over all the new leaves at once. I juggled with desk and chair, finally restoring the *status quo* with the conviction that the fault was not in the furniture. I carefully placed the chair and desk at what the diagrams showed to be the sound distance from each other. I shifted to the left and sat up, with the pride of the Sphinx surveying the desert sands on which its paws so assuredly rest. I poked the pen and my fingers about until the pen was at the exact angle to the paper and the precise position between thumb and two first fingers. I noted that the soft pad of the hand was on the paper and, as for the third and fourth fingers, feeling that I ought to do the very best thing right off and take the advice of Mr. Edward Johnston, one of the greatest of all calligraphists, I tucked them clean away into my palm. No margin of error could be allowed. I was determined to carry out my instructions to the letter. I felt, I admit, very uncomfortable: rather as one feels in the dentist's chair after the pinions have been fixed. But I meant to see it through.

I then wrote. I tried to write like print. I was anxious to turn out something like those beautiful copies of verses, reproduced by Mr.



## Why Write a Bad Hand?

Thomas, which have been done by children of seven, and even six, in the public elementary schools of London. A page in that style, I thought, would make rather a nice present; people might even like to frame it: and, ransacking my brain for the words of *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, I set to work. But how difficult is the path of virtue. With what thorns is it beset. With the utmost concentration, teeth set and in the mood of Zarathustra, I stuck at it. But what happened was not writing like print. It was the sort of print that comes out of an irascible planchette when it is jibbing against an unsympathetic manipulator. Mr. Yeats, himself, I am sure would not have recognised his charming poem. I have little time to spare and I think in this regard I had better leave progress to the next generation.

It is scarcely to be supposed that the recommendations of Mr. Thomas and those who agree with him will be universally taken up at once, though one has more hope now that the Board of Education is under Mr. Fisher than one has in ordinary times. These things spread gradually; it takes a long time for one good custom to corrupt the world! But the better thing does always prevail in the long run if its superiority is obvious to the physical senses and, granted an average life in accordance with the insurance tables, I

## Books in General

hope to see the day when copperplate and its stiff derivatives have disappeared. There was a time when any manuscript was a pleasure to contemplate: it was a work of art with a style. The time will come again. Mr. Johnston and Mr. Graily Hewitt will not be freaks, but rather unusual exponents of an art that everybody practises. When the children on whose work Mr. Thomas draws have grown up, one will begin getting bills and demands for Income Tax inscribed in so fair a hand that it will be a pleasure to pay.

## If One Were Descended from Shakespeare

**W**E all have our day-dreams. We lie indolent in chairs, not even doing the very modest things that our intelligence and physique enable us to do, and in reverie perform feats of which we are incapable and enjoy successes which we shall never earn. We rescue the perishing, sway multitudes, win victories by sudden strokes, make orations surpassing the finest efforts of Demosthenes, and erect in a week houses which Dr. Addison would consider the work of ten laborious years. My own favourite foible is hitting sixes out of Lord's, cricket being a game at which no amount of practice

## Descended from Shakespeare

and coaching could have made me anything but a complete duffer. There are no doubt those (possibly cricketers) who day-dream of success as authors, setting all England agog with epics or selling hundreds of thousands of copies of a six-shilling novel. That sort of dream would never sufficiently distract me to take my eye off my tray-full of pots, perhaps because it has some sort of relation to qualities I actually possess; I could get no sort of thrill out of any triumph with literature comparable to the delight of striding to an applauding pavilion after that hurricane century which saved the side.

But apart from these dreams of things which we do in our own proper selves, and which would be quite open to us if we were really competent to do them, there are the dreams which postulate a change in external conditions beyond our contriving. "If I were King" is a traditional phrase for a dream probably universal. There is no private citizen in the world who, were he one morning set upon the throne, would not show these professional monarchs their business. Conceive what could be done in that position, both directly and by the force of virtuous example: but, of course, you know as well as I do. I will admit to this dream. I have imagined accident, not the force of my nature, placing me on the most ancient thrones of Europe;

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and I fondly persuade myself that I know what I should do if I got there, as also I know what I should do if (a consummation I wish far more devoutly) a millionaire with a penetration and a sense of justice and propriety more than ordinary suddenly gave me an enormous sum of money. There are no desirable and not many undesirable situations in which I have not imagined myself; there are few sorts of accidents, pleasant or other, with which I have not dallied, and of which I have not endeavoured to surmise the effects. But this week I was presented, gratis, by another person, with a day-dream of a sort new to me; and I don't know whether it is a pleasant one or not.

It is one of those ingenious dogs, one's correspondents: the people who have so little honest work to do in the world that they can afford to track down one's smallest errors and, when the possibilities of this base pastime have been temporarily exhausted, employ themselves in constructing problems sometimes ingenious but never useful. "What would you do," is the question, "if you came upon proof, absolutely irrefragable (a good word that), that you, a writer yourself, were a lineal descendant in the male line of William Shakespeare? Would you divulge?"

Divulge! Why not? What fun it would



## Descended from Shakespeare

be ; besides, with that behind one, the community would never allow one to starve, a certainty that would be very agreeable, however it was obtained. One lecture-tour in America, or even in England, with those mighty credentials behind one, and one would have a bank-balance built upon the rock. Think of the prices—especially if one dropped the name of Eagle and appeared as Solomon Shakespeare—that one's critical pronouncements would command, especially if one took the obvious course and set up for an expert on the drama. "Mr. William Archer may say what he likes about the apron-stage, but there is a tradition in my family which . . . " ; "Nobody who bears, as I have the honour to bear, the dramatist's name would consider for an instant the idiotic suggestion that Hamlet was mad." "Mr. Gubb says that Shakespeare was a drunken, illiterate clown ; if he really wishes to begin bandying words about ancestors I shall presently unloose my tongue." Weight would be lent to anything one said ; the subtle influence would pervade even those opponents who considered themselves immune from it. All these patent advantages appeared at once to me. But when my fancy really got working, when I began to conceive the thing as really happening, I discovered that there would be drawbacks, too.

The announcement would, no doubt, make

## Books in General

a prodigious sensation. But would it not be seen mainly in a comic light? The first fine glow would be a little chilled by those parallel portraits in the newspapers with the captions (beginning "Look on this picture and on this") calling attention to the shrinkage of the Shakespeare forehead. One would have lustre of a sort, but it would be a comic lustre. No imaginary debate in *Punch*—those debates in which Sir Hall Caine and Sir James Crichton-Browne take part—would be complete without the younger Shakespeare, and if one ventured, as one obstinately would, to continue producing attempts at what is called "creative work" the guffaws, on each occasion, would be general and loud. You can conceive those comments: "On the whole we still prefer *King Lear*"; "Not up to the standard of the Old 'Un yet, Mr. Shakespeare"; "The Cygnet of Avon is at present a somewhat callow and ungainly bird"; "Not marble nor the gilded monuments of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme—we don't think!" The production of a new play, if any such there were, would bring this unseemly jesting to a climax; a thousand doltish chuckling voices would inform me that my progenitor's position was still secure. And what compensations, beyond the pleasure of the first dramatic disclosure, and the comfort of the adventitious dollars that could certainly be gathered in a hundred ways, would there be for all this humiliation?

## Descended from Shakespeare

I think, none. After the first excitement, the first fevered chase had finished, one would be little more than a stock and slightly stale joke. One would be revered by very simple and humourless folk. There would be unpretentious drawing-rooms where they would be proud to see one and fluttered to defer to one's authority on Elizabethan literature. The Shakespeare Society of Skegness-on-Sea would solicit, and could not be refused, the privilege of putting one's name among those of the patrons or hon. presidents at the top of its official notepaper. The eyes of unsophisticated illiterate men in the shires would light up if they were invited to play a round of golf with one; they would remember it and the recollection would be treasured in their families. One would be requested to make a little speech at the opening of the Shakespeare Festival at the Theatre Royal, Bexhill. A platform seat would always be provided at Shakespeare and National Theatre festivals in London; some fairly conspicuous rôle might be allowed at the annual junketings in Stratford. But mostly life would be a life of suburban bazaars, small prizegivings, and competitions in the recital of dramatic poetry. So life would wear on, and as it wore on one's expression would grow either more and more smug or more and more harassed—I think the latter. And every morning one would—that is to say, I should—gaze in

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the mirror with haunting fear. The depraved impulse to grow a moustache and a little pointed beard I think I could control; in any event one could never, even if one wished to succumb to that mania, hope to look as much like Shakespeare, Senr., as Sir Hall Caine does. But no power of self-control, no (as I believe) barber's medicaments, not poppy, nor mandragora, nor hair-massage can arrest that baldness which begins on the top of the head and spreads doggedly downwards on each side. When that began I should feel that the cup of my bitterness was full: I should not know whether to put up with it or to buy a wig, the motive of which might be instantly, shamefully, detected by the Press.

So I think if I discovered those irrefragable proofs I should, for fear of consequences, suppress them. They could only be made innocuous if one discovered simultaneously proofs, equally conclusive, that Shakespeare did not write his plays but was merely an obliging, or a rapacious, soul who lent his surname to Bacon or another.



## “Endymion”

### *Endymion*

**J**UST before he died Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton wrote to the *Times* a letter concerning Keats in which he protested against the current and almost universal undervaluation of *Endymion*. Quoting words of his own previously written, he observed that “the conventional talk about the futility of *Endymion* has come down to us from the unfair criticisms of Keats’s own time. It is full of poetry. When it descends into prattle, which it sometimes assuredly does, it is always the prattle of a baby Olympian.” Even men who cannot quite swallow the contention of another correspondent that *Endymion* contains an exalted ethical system may welcome this protest. For whenever Keats is mentioned in a company people—often people who state that they have been unable to read the poem—are to be heard declaring *Endymion* to be almost worthless.

What are the charges commonly made against this poem? The general charge is that, owing to the faults of its construction, it is dull to the point of being unreadable. People will frequently talk of the poem as though the only part of it worth preserving were the Song of the Indian Maid, which

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has passages admittedly almost equal to Keats's greatest work; and the contrast with *Hyperion* is frequently pointed as though to imply that one poem was written by a Jekyll and the other by a Hyde. The other charges are that the rhythm is monotonous, the language too luscious, the influence of the Cockney Hunt too strong, and forcing to suit the rhyme too frequent: that the poem, in fact, is a heterogeneous mass of crudities, interesting only because it is faintly iridescent with the light of the genius that later revealed itself. All these charges have some foundation, but not enough to affect *Endymion's* position as one of the finest long poems in the language.

That the general construction is bad and that some of the long digressions are confusing may be admitted at once. Those people who read long poems for "the story" must certainly have a tedious time with *Endymion*. Not that Keats is alone in respect of his inability to keep the story going and the characters interesting. Homer (especially Pope's Homer) sometimes nods; Milton sometimes drowns; Spenser occasionally goes to sleep; and the Wordsworth of the *Excursion* frequently snores like a Dutch sailor. There is not a long poem in the language which presents the perfect form of a good lyric, and there are few in which the narrative proceeds as cleanly, and the characters are

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## “Endymion”

delineated as clearly, as they often are even in inferior prose romances. Spenser, whose *Faerie Queene* is a most bewildering maze to tread, was a bad master of architectonics for Keats, and the structure of *Endymion* is as loose as it could be. The “story” scarcely moves at all. The introduction is confusing; the goddess is vaguely conceived, and we forget her between her rare appearances; Endymion is a shadow, and his experiences are so hazily described that one is often at a loss to know whether he is awake or dreaming; and every person who appears, be it the Indian Maid or Glaucus, is responsible for an involved digression. There is, in fact, no “story” in the usual sense of the word; we knew before we started that Endymion was beloved by Diana, and we know little more of their relations when we end, in spite of all the peregrinations through caves and waters, in dells, jasmine bowers, and boats.

The details, again, are sometimes weak, though the style as a whole is nothing like so immature and weak in taste as some people pretend. There are redundancies such as the older Keats might not have committed. There is a striking one in the Second Book, where Endymion ceases speaking in the cavern:

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*Thus ending loudly, as he would o'erleap  
His destiny, alert he stood : but when  
Obstinate silence came heavily again  
Feeling about for its old couch of space  
And airy cradle.*

Here a fine piece of imaginative description is crippled by its feebly tautologous termination. The poet intrudes England and his own personality too much into the work, and shows a juvenile proclivity for interrupting his tale with exclamations like

*Muse of my native land, am I inspired ?*

Here and there more discretion might have been used in the language. The word which jarred on many who read the song recently published in the *Times* reappears here :

*My Indian bliss !  
My river-lily bud ! one human kiss !  
One sigh of real breath—one gentle squeeze.*

Objection to this may be a matter for difference of opinion, as may the picture of the moonbeams relieving the tedium of the "poor patient oyster," but no one could find beauty in Endymion's address to the goddess's lips :

*Those lips, O slippery blisses.*

Such a *faux pas* as this is, however, very

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exceptional. And though laboured and un-  
gainly phrases like

*Hereat Peona, in their silver source  
Shut her pure sorrow-drops with glad exclaim*

may be found if one looks for them, they are not numerous. Its defects of outline *Endymion* shares with many great poems; its defects of detail are far less numerous than seems usually supposed.

Over against its faults must be set merits which would have ensured its immortality had its author never written anything else. However long the digressions, there is something to be said for wandering from the strait and narrow path if one's feet are always led into pleasant places. The poem is one long procession of inexhaustibly varied beauties, of music, of image, and of phrase. You have only to read the first page of it to realise that here was a poet who was handling the couplet as it had not been handled for generations. That the summery undulations of the rhythm should in places become soporific was inevitable, but Keats's mastery over it rarely fails. That the reader is sometimes cloyed and glutted with the richness and profusion of the imagery may be true; but the fault involved is a fault of the right sort, and the sumptuousness of the poem is

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spontaneous, and not arduously accumulated. The vocabulary is almost Shakespearean in its resource; and every page is starred with passages of exquisitely accurate expression and enchanting sound. So interwoven are many of them with their context that, pulled out by the roots, they lose something of their strength and radiance; but there are also many isolated phrases, such as

*Old ocean rolls a lengthen'd wave to the shore  
Down whose green back the short-lived foam,  
all hoar,  
Burst gradual, with a wayward indolence.*

which would show, did nothing else exist to show, whence the descriptive poets who came after Keats obtained their method. The passages here quoted are mostly not exceptional; they are a few out of hundreds and none of them comes from the much-anthologised Song:

*It seemed he flew, the way so easy was;  
And like a new-born spirit did he pass  
Through the green evening quiet in the sun  
O'er many a heath, through many a woodland  
dun,  
Through buried paths, where sleepy twilight  
dreams  
The summer time away. One track unseams*



## “Endymion”

*A wooded cleft, and, far away, the blue  
Of ocean fades upon him ; then anew,  
He sinks adown a solitary glen,  
Where there was never sound of mortal men,  
Saving, perhaps, some snow-light cadences  
Melting to silence, when upon the breeze  
Some holy bark let forth an anthem sweet,  
To cheer itself to Delphi.*

*Forth from a rugged arch, in the dusk below,  
Came mother Cybele ! alone—alone—  
In sombre chariot ; dark foldings thrown  
About her majesty, and front death-pale,  
With turrets crown'd. Four maned lions hale  
The sluggish wheels ; solemn their toothed  
maws,  
Their surly eyes brow-hidden, heavy paws  
Uplifted drowsily, and nervy tails  
Covering their tawny brushes. Silent sails  
This shadowy queen athwart, and faints away  
In another gloomy arch.*

*Hist ! when the airy stress  
Of music's kiss impregnates the free winds,  
And with a sympathetic touch unbinds  
Æolian magic from their lucid wombs :  
Then old songs waken from enclouded tombs,  
Old ditties sigh above their father's grave ;  
Ghosts of melodious prophesyings rave  
Round every spot where trod Apollo's foot ;  
Bronze clarions awake, and faintly bruit,  
Where long ago a giant battle was ;*



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*And from the turf, a lullaby doth pass  
In every place where infant Orpheus slept.*

*This still alarm,  
This sleepy music! forced him to walk tiptoe,  
For it came more softly than the east could blow  
Arion's music to the Atlantic isles ;  
Or than the west, made jealous by the smiles  
Of throned Apollo, could breathe back the life  
To seas Ionian or Tyrian.*

In these and scores of other passages of *Endymion* all Keats's gifts are displayed, from the highest gift of intense imagination to the minor technical faculty of using decorative proper names with Miltonic power.

There is little appeal to the religious sense in man. Keats had, when he wrote it, a limited conception of the text with which he began it; and in *Endymion* the old myths appeal to him rather by virtue of their picturesqueness than because of their spiritual significance. Had he lived he might have become a philosophical poet, but the immortals of *Endymion* are merely mortals indued with immortality, and it contains little sign of inward strife. Anything a man says, provided it is sincerely said, can be traced back to something fundamental in him, but the poet of *Endymion* was not much concerned with the nature and destiny of man or his relations with the

## Solid Ben Jonson

universe. He was preoccupied with the beauty of the material world, the pathos of love, youth, and age. On these he spent artistic powers, already almost ripe, unequalled in his century. But though *Endymion* may not be conspicuous for profundity of thought, it contains in abundance every other attribute of supreme poetry. No part of the poem is equal to the opening of *Hyperion* or the most consummate passages of the Odes; and for coherence of narration and "human interest" it cannot hope to vie with *Out with the Lifeboat* or *Christmas Day in the Workhouse*. Keats himself spoke of it as rather "an endeavour than a thing accomplished," and "a poor prologue to what, if I live, I humbly hope to do." But how else, if he spoke of it at all, could he speak of it? Slightly inexperienced, but marvellously written, it remains a great poem, which will be read, as it has been read, by every person who is fit to read poetry at all.

## Solid Ben Jonson

PROFESSOR GREGORY SMITH'S *Ben Jonson*, in Macmillan's "English Men of Letters Series," has at last appeared. It is the best thing on Jonson that exists, very readable in parts, and elsewhere as readable as anything on the subject could be.

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The accounts of Ben's life and character are excellent. They were more remarkable than his plays. His stepfather brought him up as a bricklayer; as a young bricklayer he became a master of the classical tongues. He possibly went to Cambridge, after being sent to Westminster by a man who had heard him reciting Greek. At about twenty he spent some time as a soldier in the Low Countries, killing his man in single combat in sight of both armies. Before 1598 (he was twenty-five or so), when *Every Man in His Humour* appeared, he had done a good deal of work for the stage. In that year he was tried at the Old Bailey for killing an actor (honourably, he says), escaped the gallows by pleading benefit of clergy, was fined and branded. In 1604 he was thrown into prison and narrowly escaped sentence of mutilation for making a joke about Scotsmen. Thereafter his career was chequered, but not quite so violently. He lived to become Poet Laureate (save in name) and City Chronologer and to receive a Royal pension. His learning far exceeded that of any other playwright; his output, for volume and diversity of content, was enormous. He wrote tragedies, comedies, masques, songs, epitaphs, epigrams, monologues, and a grammar. For many years he was the acknowledged president of letters; yet most of his works failed, and he made little money out of them.

## Solid Ben Jonson

Professor Gregory Smith analyses and classifies them with great care. He corrects the general error that Jonson ruined himself by a classified pedantry; in the major part of his work, the comic, his pedantry was a doctrine of his own; he was reacting against the romantics, determined to be a realist and show character. What his works would have been like had his theories been different (I have heard him called the Ibsen of his time) is a vain speculation, though the lovely and fantastic poetry of *The Sad Shepherd* must provoke it. He was what he was: a scholar with the realistic passion; his works are intermittently inflated with life, and all that concerns him is interesting because of the force of his character. No figure among his contemporaries is so vivid as that of this great man, lank and raw-boned when young, very corpulent in middle age, who would bear no contradiction, yet was primarily concerned with the theories for which he fought, not because they were his, but because they were truths. The resemblances to Samuel Johnson have often been pointed out, resemblances of figure, of physical disability, of taste, of habit. The parallel should not be pushed too far. Johnson's drink was tea and his weapon talk; of Ben it was said that strong liquor was "one of the elements in which he liveth," and he was a bruiser. Samuel had more common-sense than Ben, and less poetry, and for all



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the great Cham's domineering he was a great success in mixed company. Ben's fierceness gave mortal offence; he called people "illiterate apes" to their faces, and suffered for it. "Fortune," he said, "could never break him, or make him less." But he offered her more provocations than Samuel did, and she was harder on the first Jonson than on the second.

Professor Gregory Smith's book was worth waiting for. There are no rival studies of this range for it to supersede; if there were they would have to be very good indeed not to be superseded. It is done with thorough competence. Professor Gregory Smith does not write brilliantly, and his criticism is not of that imaginative kind that makes literature out of literature. But he has unusual commonsense, and he has taken immense pains. The form of his book is admirable; and every chapter, without being overcrowded, is well filled. If there are errors of detail it is not I who can correct them; I agree with every judgment that I am in a position to test, and I find the quotations most admirably selected. They show, in little, the range of Ben's knowledge, the richness of his plays as a storehouse of contemporary manners, the vigour of his conversational phrasing, the insistence of his self-revelation, the little, but precious, honey that was in the rough carcase of this lion. The one quotation that I miss would be one



## Solid Ben Jonson

of the best known as it would certainly be the loveliest ; a few lines from that song of the swan's down and the nard of the bee, in which Ben handled an unusual lyrical rhythm with the delicacy of Campion or Mr. Bridges. The absence of a bibliographical chapter—we could do with a list, and a summary of the problem of the collected works would be useful—is no doubt accounted for by lack of space. The one thing I do find faulty is the contrast between the tone of the first chapter (which deals with Ben's life) and the last, in which we hear of his disciples and his influence. Engaged, at the beginning, with Ben's loneliness and independence and poverty, Professor Gregory Smith, with a natural inclination to heighten the pathos of the white-haired playwright's last years, overdoes his picture by omissions. It was just in those years that the loyal young tribe of Ben, the Carolines, were about ; a few of the references in the last chapter, if transferred to the first, would modify the impression that the first gives. It is a mistake anyone might have made, and the blemish does not much matter.

I do not think that after this book, any more than before, I shall become a habitual reader of Ben Jonson. It is not without reason that nobody reads him ; he is tough work, and there is not enough behind most of the toughness to repay the labour of pene-

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tration. But the less one likes reading him the more impressed one is by the force of that personality which has kept him, to generations that have not opened his plays, on a pedestal higher than all except the greatest names in our literature. His magnetic strength is so great—at least to me—that even a sight of the portrait of the honest, passionate old bully's bearded heavy face is enough to send one back to his plays. An extract or two from Drummond's conversations—his remarks, for instance, that Donne ought to have been hanged for writing bad verses, and that Shakespeare sometimes had been sat on for talking too much—produce a similar effect. Here, in this biography, we have all the best and most characteristic of him, and it sent me straight back to my volume of the folio "Woorkes" of 1641. It is a remarkable copy. The candid bookseller who sold it to me years ago said: "If you buy this you will be able to say that you have the worst complete copy of Ben Jonson in the world." Who could resist the opportunity of such a boast? Worm and water have reduced the book to the appearance and consistency of a mouldy sponge. But it is "all there." I took it up once more, paused on the marked passages, songs, and epigrams and bits of banter in the plays (much the same things as Professor Gregory Smith selects for commendation) and tried to read some of the plays right

## The Deaths of the Philosophers

through. I knew, from experience, that I could just manage *The Alchemist*; I knew, from experience, that only an effort not worth making twice would take me through *Epicæne* or *Volpone*; I knew, from experience, that only the threat of death or mutilation as an alternative would get me through *Sejanus* or *Catiline*; so I tried one or two others that I had not for many years looked at. But even *Bartholomew Fair* was only entertaining in places, as a rule altogether too crowded with topicality of the kind that does not carry across the ages, and full of lumbering humour; and I knew again, as I have known before, that what I want is a very small selection from Ben Jonson, containing only his best. I deduce from his book that (though as a scholar he would like somebody to do the complete poems of Jonson, which have not been brought together) as a reading person the Professor also would prefer a small selection. Cannot he make one?

## The Deaths of the Philosophers

**H**AS anyone ever dared to explain how it was that most of the distinguished philosophers of antiquity met with unusual and even extraordinary deaths? Men of all professions (notably men attached to

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the profession of arms) often came to violent ends in those vigorous ages. The oratory of Cicero did not save him from the sword, and all the tragedies of Æschylus were of no avail against the eagle that chose his bald head as a stone on which to drop a massive tortoise. But the philosophers were marked out by the acrimonious gods in such a way as to make it seem probable that the celestial powers felt revengeful towards them. Olympus was irritated with these eavesdroppers and spies. They must be shown that the hold was well guarded and the garrison awake; that no stealth and no daring could ultimately save the mortal scout from the weapons of the sentinels. Thus it was that few of the philosophers met the normal deaths of men.

It is easy, if one cares, to confirm this by reference to those who have written of these philosophers; to Diogenes Laertius, to Valerius Maximus, to Horace and Pliny, and to the untiring Julius Lemprierius who synthesises them all. Very few are those who escaped some sudden and disastrous ejection from the world; so few that one cannot resist the conclusion that for these individuals there was some excuse or palliation that tempered the divine anger. So it was with Zeno the Stoic who died in his ninety-eighth year having never (previously) been ill in his life; so also with Theophrastus; though that Lesbian

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## The Deaths of the Philosophers

Diderot scarcely deserved his preferential treatment. For, dying in the hundred and seventh year of his age, he ventured to complain of the shortness of life and of "the partiality of nature in granting longevity to the crow and the stag but not to man." But for most of them there was no clemency, and they died by murder, by suicide, or by the ferocity of the elements.

Great Archimedes, obsessed by his hydraulics, could not collect his thoughts sufficiently to reveal his identity to the invading soldier; he fell with Syracuse. Longinus at Palmyra similarly was carved up; he had massacred many another author in his critical days, if indeed he was himself and not another gentleman of the same name. Zeno the Eleatic was tortured to death by a tyrant; though, on the pretence of an important whisper, he contrived to bite off the tyrant's ear, and thus remove a portion of death's sting. Socrates was compelled to poison himself, and Seneca to commit auto-phlebotomy in his bath. The death of Epicurus was inexpressibly painful, and Plato expired in the act of writing something; which must have been agonising for him.

Chrysippus met the end he deserved. All his life he had made puns and quibbles of which a negro-minstrel corner-man would



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have been ashamed, and he died from excess of laughter caused by the spectacle of an ass eating figs from a silver platter. Stilpo (brazen enough to call himself a Stoic) deliberately got drunk when *in extremis*, so that the aspect of death might appear less terrible ; and Chilo (one of the seven alleged wise men) succumbed to a fit of joy caused by his son's success at Olympia. Yet this has undeniable elements of a glorious, though unpleasantly sudden death. Make it Professor —— and the Antwerp Stadium and the gulf is most apparent ; the utmost we can say is that Herbert Spencer knew the game of billiards and once went to see the Derby. Ariston, like Æschylus, found his bald head the gateway of doom ; though in this case the instrument of destiny was not a tortoise, but the sun. Drowned each one, as men suppose, were Protagoras, Archytas, Xenocrates and Aristotle. Of the first's demise we know no more ; but Archytas found death in a shipwreck, Xenocrates, after one knows not what an evening, fell from his couch depositing his head in a basin of water, and the Stagirite, his industry thwarted at last, flung himself (it is reported) into the Euripus because he was unable to discover the cause of its flux and reflux.

The flames of Etna devoured the body of Empedocles. Polemon buried himself alive as a protest against persistent gout. As for

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Heraclitus, he who paraded his misanthropy and his egoism, the mode of his departure is uncertain. At least it was one thing or the other. Either he was devoured by dogs—with the possible exception of the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet—or he perished on a dunghill whose warmth he had hoped would relieve the dropsy he had contracted from a foolish régime of fresh air and vegetarian diet.

Into the night go one and all ; the goal is always the same, but the vehicles on the way vary in speed, in comfort, and in dignity. Philosophers nowadays do not die as they used to do, furious drivers on the Styx highroad. Like others they saunter. The gods no longer goad them ; they do not drown themselves over insoluble problems or sit on unwholesome dunghills or harvest knowledge in beleaguered towns or laugh at masticating donkeys. They are treated like the rest of us and the manner of Professor ——'s death will be even as yours and mine. But whether this is because the gods have relented and repented their anger against the race of cosmic adventurers, or whether it is that they believe the danger to their secrets to have passed by and care not to dignify with their hate the harmless and the mean, I have neither the desire nor the authority to say.

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Perhaps, after all, there is merely a lull in the persecution of the philosophers. Next year or the year after Providence may again interpose to remind them of its existence and their own rashness. We may yet live to see a return to the old system of things. Professor Pott may kill himself in order to demonstrate the futility of Monism; dogs may eat Sir Murray Watt-Hoe; Dr. Junkermann may be choked by swallowing a fly, and a sudden thunderbolt may dispose of Principal Wilkins, F.R.S., author of that excellent little work "A Manual of Metaphysics."

## Pacifism in Poetry

**I**N a shop I noticed a collection called *The Minstrelsy of Peace* (by J. B. Glasier), and, as I had never seen a peace anthology before, I bought it. It has been compiled in a missionary spirit, but the editor has taken great trouble with his selection, has not overloaded his book with very bad propagandist verse, and has, on the whole, made as good a job of it as anyone is likely to make.

There are obvious limitations to a peace anthology. In a collection of war-literature you can put anything which is conditioned

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by a state of war ; not only songs expressing the pure joy of combat (which are very few in number), but laments for the slain, exhortations to those who are fighting for a just cause, and poems springing out of that intense, and often admirable, self-conscious patriotism which is generated by a conflict, and especially by a conflict against odds. If war-anthologies could draw on nothing except works glorifying war and fighting for their own sakes, irrespective of justice and overlooking bloodshed and suffering, they would be very thin indeed. Your militarist is not usually a good poet ; cruelty and aggressiveness seldom go with a feeling for beauty. But the pacifist anthologist has no such wide reference as the martial anthologist usually takes. He cannot—at least he does not—include the whole range of pacific occupations and aspirations within his purview. He does not take in Gray's *Elegy* because Gray would not have been able to write it if a battle had been raging around Stoke Poges when he was there, and he cannot regard the whole field of pastoral poetry as his province merely because of the absence of war. Peace is normal and war is abnormal. He is confined to moralising exposures of the horrors of war and to propagandist expositions of the comparative attractions of peace ; he is in fact, compelled to confine himself to directly didactic work. And poetry openly didactic,



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written first and foremost with the end of inculcating a lesson, is seldom very good poetry. Most of Mr. Glasier's selections come within this category—and it cannot be helped.

But there are several surprising things about his collection. One is that he has got very little out of the "pietists," who are usually much too preoccupied about God and their souls to write about either war or peace. "From Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Herrick [scarcely a pietist], Crashaw, Dr. Watts, the Wesleys, Keble," he says, "I have got not a line." The second is that with those exceptions almost every prominent English poet has been impelled, once or twice or oftener, to write (usually in very bald verse) a protest against the beastliness and injustice of war. He starts very early, with Gower, who wrote :

*For peace, beseech peace for all men !  
Amen, amen, amen, amen.*

and—in words that many people have echoed during recent years—

*There is no thing whereof mischief may grow  
Which is not caused by the war, I trow.*

Sir David Lyndsay—of the Mount, Lord Lyon King-at-Arms—wrote :



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*War generates murder and mischief,  
Sore lamenting without relief.  
War sheddeth muckle guiltless blood.  
Since I can say of war no good,  
Declare to me, sir, if ye can,  
Who first this misery began.*

Spenser and Sackville, in many grave stanzas, depicted the foul face of war; and Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke (whose ingenious and difficult poems are too generally neglected) spoke of :

*This spirit which stirs mankind with man to war,  
Which devils do not, wherein worse we are.*

Southwell, the martyred Jesuit, struck a finer note than any of his predecessors :

*I wrestle not with rage  
When fury's flame doth burn ;  
It is vain to stop the stream  
Until the tide return.*

*But when the flame is out,  
And ebbing wrath doth end ;  
I turn a late enraged foe  
Into a quiet friend.*

*To rise by others' fall  
I deem a losing-gain ;  
All States, with others' ruin built,  
To ruin, run amain.*

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Had that lesson been learnt by the partitioners of Poland and the robbers of Alsace-Lorraine we should not have had the war; but history repeats herself in vain—nobody listens. Samuel Daniel went too far; in an apothegm which might have been taken for a motto by the Pharisees who have stood aside while the future of the world was being decided, he said :

*Wise men ever have preferred far  
Th' injustest peace before the justest war.*

But he may not have meant quite all that he appears to mean.

A very pertinent quotation is Henry V.'s threat of "frightfulness" at Harfleur. This is well known; but less attention has been given to Henry IV.'s disgusting advice to his son (frequently acted on by European monarchs) to distract his people from home affairs by getting up foreign quarrels. He had, he says, had the intention of going on a Crusade with this object :

*Therefore, my Harry,  
Be it thy course to busy giddy minds  
With foreign quarrels : that action, hence borne out,  
May waste the memory of the former days.*

Campion, Drummond, Beaumont, and Milton  
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are all drawn on. The extracts from the latter include the passage about war breeding war, and the necessity of distinguishing between might and right, which concludes with :

*In vain doth Valour bleed  
When Avarice and Rapine share the land.*

Edward Young, of the *Night Thoughts*, put a common gibe into metre when he wrote :

*One to destroy is murder by the law  
And gibbets keep the lifted hand in awe ;  
To murder thousands takes a specious name—  
War's glorious art—and gives immortal fame.*

And Robert Burns had a remark for the militarists who call down Gott's blessing on their work :

*Ye hypocrites ! are these your pranks ?  
To murder men and give God thanks.  
Desist for shame ! Proceed no further !  
God won't accept your thanks for murder !*

Whatever the merits of the argument, even a Scotsman must admit this to be about as bad poetry as any man ever wrote. Desist for shame !

Shelley and Hardy are very largely quoted ; but the most forcible extracts come from Byron, who used to make much the same sort of points as Mr. Siegfried Sassoon.

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### The Treaty of Versailles

SIR ERIC GEDDES, at the time of the 1918 Election, pleasantly canvassed the possibility of stripping Germany of all her old books and works of art in part payment of the indemnity. The Federation of British Industries favoured similar measures and gave as an instance of the sort of thing that might be had for the asking, or the demanding—the Dresden Madonna. We have not recently heard much of proposals of this sort; and, although I have pronounced opinions about them, this is not the page on which readers would be entitled to expect a discussion of how we shall Make Germany Pay. I should think, however, that the one related clause which does appear in the Peace Terms is beyond controversy: that which enacts that Germany shall replace art-treasures in kind. Writing from a summary of the Treaty (which itself appears to be about as long as the *Pickwick Papers*) I do not know precisely what is to come within this schedule: it is not proposed, I take it, to import a German cathedral to replace that of Rheims. Nor do I know how much damage the Germans have done to books and pictures. Certainly not as much as they might have done: a friend recently back from Bruges tells me



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that all the old pictures are in all the old places—where, indeed, the Germans insisted on them being put after the Belgians had buried them. There are probably things gone from Liège and Namur; but the greatest losses sustained in the war resulted from the burning of the Library of Louvain, the greatest library in a wantonly invaded neutral country.

The finest treasures of a great library are in their nature irreplaceable. There were at Louvain, for instance, a unique collection of Irish manuscripts. But there should be little difficulty in getting for Louvain a collection of equivalent value. Germany, where printing was born, where Fust, Schoeffer, Koberer, Sensenschmidt, Mentelin and other illustrious men were printing in the fourteen-seventies, the great centre of primitive book illustration, is rich in early-printed books as she has been in the bibliographers of incunabula. There are many German States and many German Universities: every one has a library. There are nearly a hundred libraries of some importance in Berlin. The royal library is nearly three hundred years old, and has had, since the late seventeenth century, the right to a copy of every book printed in the dominions of Prussia—not that that, as to quality or quantity, can have amounted to much in those days. About £5,000 a year is spent in purchases for it, and it contains upwards of

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a million and-a-half books. The Munich Library dates from the middle of the sixteenth century, and contains one of the finest collection of incunabula in Europe. There are over a million books in it and nearly thirty thousand manuscripts, from among which some may certainly be selected which will grace the Library at Louvain. The Royal Library at Dresden—for the Germans started their big libraries early—is equally old and contains half-a-million books. There are another half-a-million at Stuttgart, which is rich in manuscripts, half-a-million more at Darmstadt, and half-a-million more at Leipzig University. There are about ten other University Libraries containing between 200,000 and 500,000 books ; and the range of selection of prints and pictures to replace whatever was at Louvain is almost equally wide. The one thing it would be cruel to demand would be the “Leonardo Bust,” which could only be got over the dead body of Dr. Bode. It will be remembered that this rather charming effigy was irrefragably proved to be by one R. Lucas, of Hampshire ; I think that a pair of his Victorian trousers or some such thing was found inside it. But it would take a whole wardrobe to make Dr. Bode abandon a judgment formed on what is called stylistic grounds ; and when I was in Berlin, in 1914, the bust was still proudly displayed and labelled as Leonardo’s without so much as an interrogation mark.

## Notes on Shakespeare

I have seen as yet no particulars as to the method by which Louvain's compensations are to be selected. However they are taken—and I cannot help sympathising with bibliophiles even when they are Germans—I fear that there will be a good many spectacled old librarians in Germany, men probably who find it hard to take an interest in any wars later than those of Charles V., who will (whatever is rapt from them) feel that the things they lose are the things that, above all, they value. A million four hundred thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine books may be left; but the one that has been transported to Belgium will, if the German book-worm is true to type, be just the one that was needed to make the collection complete.

## Notes on Shakespeare

**T**WO documents about Shakespeare reach me simultaneously. One is Dean Beeching's lecture to the British Academy, and the other Sheet 1 of "A Chronological Table Showing What is Proved and Not Proved about Shakespeare's Life and Work," prepared for the London Shakespeare League by Mr. William Poel. This sheet covers the years up to 1603, from April 26th, 1564, the date of Shakespeare's baptism

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—for, though this is not always remembered, the date of his birth is unknown. I shall insert Mr. Poel's leaflet in the covers of Sir Sidney Lee's *Life of Shakespeare* as a constant reminder of the relative proportions of proven facts and cunning speculations in that vast and most admirable work. Mr. Poel's table contains four columns. In the first we get "Facts"—(a) Stratford-on-Avon, and (b) London; in the second "Traditions"; in the third "Contemporary Events and Allusions"; and in the fourth "Unproved," with a subsection "Unknown." Unknown are the following :

"Date of birth; what he did before he was eighteen; whether he saw the Queen at Kenilworth; date and place of marriage; where he lived afterwards; when he left Stratford; which year he reached London; when he first joined a company of players; when he returned to Stratford."

It is just as well to bear these things in mind.

Mr. Poel has had the rather grim notion of inserting under each "fact" about Shakespeare the contemporary facts about Shakespeare's father, and the contrast between the careers of the two is most painful. When Shakespeare was four, his father was Mayor of Stratford; when he was seven his father



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was chief Alderman; when he was fourteen "father's money troubles begin. Mother pawns her estate, 'Ashbies,' and her lands at Snitterfield." When he was sixteen his father failed to redeem this pawned property. So at eighteen Shakespeare marries, and by the time he is twenty-one he has three children. "Father's debts increase. A writ served, but no goods to distrain. He forfeits his Alderman's gown."

"Father, fearing arrest, fined for not going to church, 1592." Four years after this Shakespeare *files* make his first application to the Heralds' College for a coat of arms. And in 1597, when only 33, he buys New Place and an acre of land for a sum equivalent to nearly £500 of our money. But the old people in that year are described as "of small wealth and very few friends." At thirty-four Shakespeare is called "gentleman" in civic documents, and the Corporation wants to sell him tithes. Next year the mother—who would scarcely have bothered about this had not the son relieved his parents' situation—claims the arms of Arden of Park Hall. In 1601, "Father dies intestate," and in 1602 Shakespeare buys a hundred and seven acres of land for £2,560 (modern money), as well as a cottage and a quarter-acre at the back of New Place. The Globe Playhouse was not built until Shakespeare was thirty-five. He

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must either have been a prodigiously well-paid actor, or his publishers must have paid him royalties which our publishers do not pay us, or he got money without earning it. The tradition that Southampton gave him £1,000 dates only from 1709. He was thirty when Spenser and Drayton praised him, and thirty-four when Meres said he was the best English dramatist for comedy and tragedy. It is worth while remembering that he was a successful, prosperous, and admired young man in spite of all the disadvantages of upbringing which have been so much exaggerated—no one would think, "for instance," that the "drunken, illiterate clown" of the Baconians was the son of His Worship the Mayor of Stratford-on-Avon. I recommend this leaflet as a useful memorandum.

Dean Beeching's lecture is slight and reasonable. It is largely a refutation of current heresies which are themselves partly the result of natural reaction against the traditional worship of Shakespeare, and partly the product of a perverse desire to say something new and an even more unpleasant desire to blacken a character generally assumed to be good. He disposes of the current assumption that Shakespeare was strongly anti-Puritan (though he omits the "cakes and ale" passage, which is much more to the point than the drunken slobberings of Sir A. Aguecheek), and that

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he was conspicuously anti-democratic, though he agrees that the poet was devoted to "law and order"—in other words, that he was not a Bolshevik and knew why he was not one. But the chief theories with which he deals are: (1) that under which Shakespeare's thought had no connection whatever with his life, and his drama "is like a magnificent orchid, which has no organic connection with that which carries it"; and (2) that which maintains that no attitude towards life or morals can be deduced from his plays, which are merely the most remarkable cinematograph films ever made. The first doctrine could only be held by a man who had a complete misunderstanding of the nature of imaginative art; as Dean Beeching says: "Would it be possible for a dramatist to draw what we call a *noble* character, and to represent him, throughout a whole play, speaking and acting always from high motives, if he were himself vulgar-minded and high-spirited? We should require a clear instance of such a phenomenon before we could believe it." The second has been held by men apparently intelligent, but seems to me equally incomprehensible. There is in these plays, and has been almost unconsciously felt and honoured in them by generations of English people, a passion for generous and honourable living, and a belief in Christian morals which simply could not exist without a continual effort

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on the part of the writer to live up to his standards, though an occasional failure must be expected of the best of men. The conception of Shakespeare the neurotic slave of his passions simply does not square with the voice one hears speaking when one reads him. Nor does it square with the facts of his early career ; and still less does it square with the testimonials of his friends, the importance and uniformity of which is still too often ignored. Candour, gentleness, fertility of idea, humour in conversation : these are the stock attributes imputed to him. The one complaint made is that his high-spirited talk was sometimes too profuse ; but this complaint comes from Ben Jonson, who, when sitting in a tavern or elsewhere with a number of friends, cannot be imagined in any other place than the head of the table or in any other rôle than that of conversational Pope. Shakespeare, one imagines, was different : full of admiration for the peculiar graces of other people, and satisfied occasionally to keep his smiles and his retorts up his sleeve. But what am I doing ? Beginning to formulate my own ideas about Shakespeare ? By heaven, nothing on earth is going to persuade me to do that. So I hurriedly take down an engraving of the Stratford Bust and a copy of the Droeshout portrait ; they put the extinguisher on at once.



## Maeterlinck

### Maeterlinck

**A**S one looks back upon the early plays of Maeterlinck—the plays with which he made his reputation, and upon which his reputation still chiefly stands—what memory is evoked in the mind? It is the memory of a single mood and a single character. There were three-act plays and one-act plays; there were old men, young men, women, and children. But, even whilst one was reading them in succession, there seemed little difference of persons or of plots; and in retrospect all these plays melt into one. In desolate and forlorn places, primeval woods, or old castles crumbling between the marshes and the sea, where daylight is wan and hopeless and darkness full of horror, vague pale forms grope like somnambulists hither and thither. They stray under the great trees and in and out of the heavily-studded doors. The sea moans. The trees shake. Small winds arise and are still. Doors open and shut; footsteps echo along lonely corridors; ancestral voices prophesy doom. In monotonous accents the forms talk to each other or mutter to themselves; the presence of impending Death is palpable on all sides; and their every word and act is accompanied by a single gesture of the soul, the gesture of despair.

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There are loves, hates, jealousies, and murders in these plays. But nothing really counts except the fears. Where, after several acts, the puppets get fidgety and try to come to life, and you have a burst of self-assertive violence (like Golaud's Othello-like passion), it is out of atmosphere, and juts forth like a rock out of flat sand. The diversities of sex and age do not matter; the persons are all lost, hopeless, vainly throwing up their arms to screen their heads from the blows of Death or Destiny—the same thing to Maeterlinck. They speak in fragmentary moans: "Elle pleure . . ." "On frappe . . ." "J'ai peur . . ." and the silences which heavily intersperse these Ollendorffian laments are more eloquent of terror than the words. "Men fear death as children fear to go into the dark"; and in Maeterlinck both these fears are omnipresent. The characters hover precariously on a tiny island of half-light surrounded by awful darkness, and the darkness throws in long clutching arms full of cruelty, disaster, and death. The "menace of the invisible" is omnipresent; "the will" (as Miss Taylor<sup>1</sup> remarks), "the brain, all faculties of action, succumb as if blunted under a spell. They become spellbound as the will, as the thoughts and deeds of a trance." And the appeal of these spectacles of the domination of fear is "mainly to the nerves." Take

<sup>1</sup> *Maurice Maeterlinck*. By Una Taylor. Secker.

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*Les Aveugles*—perhaps the most effective of all the plays. In a dark avenue of funereal trees six blind men and six blind women talk in broken quavering phrases as they await the wakening of their sleeping guide, the old priest. But he is dead; it was Death's step that they had faintly heard; and as they pass their weak hands over the dead man's face the snow begins to fall. Neither they, nor the people in the other plays, are human enough to stir the sentiment of pity. They are merely types, automata, whose very inhumanity is a part of the general scheme for making the watcher's flesh creep and his blood run cold. And it is Maeterlinck's faculty for doing this that for a time made his plays, at any rate in book-form, as popular as *Pepper's Ghost*.

What was there novel about these plays that gave them such a vogue? There is certainly nothing novel about pessimism, melancholy, or horror, and there is a great deal of these in the world's finest literature. Maeterlinck himself is the progeny of a whole school of writers whose thought ranged from a tender *tristesse* to the blackest pessimism. His plays have been frequently referred to as the work of "the great Belgian mystic." Certainly he has written about Ruysbroek, and was born in Belgium. He may be a mystic; if so, he is a mystic without a God.

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He may be a Belgian ; but if so, he is a Belgian *émigré*. His most characteristic plays are not the work of a Belgian mystic, but of a French decadent. He himself has admitted his great debt to Villiers de l'Isle Adam ; his artistic relation to Baudelaire and to the Symbolists is quite as apparent. For a whole generation the mass of good French verse and prose was obsessed with gloom ; with the inscrutability of Destiny, the vanity of Life, the tyranny of Death, with vague hankerings and inassuageable regrets. Maeterlinck's first book—*Serres Chaudes*—was quite in the most morbid tradition ; a volume of lyrics in which, as Miss Taylor says, "poem follows poem, the outcome of a melancholy as vaguely sterile as it is incurable," and "sorrow has no source as it has no anodyne." There was skill in them, chaotic as they were, but verses to the tune of

*Mon âme en est triste à la fin ;  
Elle est triste d'être lasse,  
Elle est lasse enfin d'être en vain,  
Elle est triste et lasse à la fin,*

would never have given anybody a European reputation. Montparnasse was full of gentlemen who were as *triste* and *las* as they could possibly be. But Maeterlinck's great inspiration came when he thought of putting the mood of decadent lyric upon the stage, and

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when he thought also of staging the dots ( . . . ) as well as the words. The enormous utility of these dots one need not labour. Scores of modern writers have used them, and when they are wisely used they are very effective. Maeterlinck scatters them, or their equivalent, promiscuously. The eternal silence not only envelopes his characters, but sticks continually in their throats. If, as Mr. Everard Meynell has remarked, "chunks out of the abyss make his scenes," for his most effective dialogue he borrows from silence. To a great degree Maeterlinck may be said to supply the framework of his plays and the audience to fill in the words. The thought of Death, the down-turned lights, and the properties would do the rest.

He had, in fact, hit upon a "stunt"—a "stunt" so good as to entitle him to the name of genius, but, nevertheless, a "stunt." And he worked it for all it was worth. I do not suggest for a moment that Maeterlinck's pessimism was insincere. Even his last book of moralisings was a cheerless brochure upon Death, and no man who was not naturally prone to melancholy could have written so continually on Death. In fact, he has almost done Death to death, as anyone looking through Miss Taylor's book can see. But his pessimism was, in the first place, not really so thorough-going as it appears in his plays; and in the

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second place it was utterly flabby. Let the point of absolute sincerity go ; a man is at liberty to make a work of art out of any one of his moods or anyone else's moods—though, in the case of works so subjective as these, it is surely true that lack of conviction is bound to result in literary weakness. But about the flabbiness there can be no two opinions. There is flabbiness both in the feeling of the plays and in their writing. The great melancholiacs of literature have, at least, had force, courage, virility, and, often, profound humanity. But Maeterlinck is spiritually bloodless. "He has raised the standard of the Unseen," says Miss Taylor—though "hoisted the black flag of the Unseen" would be a better phrase. That is so, but he has never greeted the Unseen with a cheer. He has not even been able, like that great and courageous artist Baudelaire, to greet it with a sneer. All he has been able to give it is a shudder. In the mouths of his characters the "wail for the world's wrong" is a dismal bleat ; and when, in Villiers' phrase

*le Destin taciturne*  
*Dans l'ombre dit "Assez"*

to its victims one feels that they have been waiting for this moment all their lives. It is a slack enervating atmosphere ; and ultimately it is a monotonous and *boring* one. A

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pessimist of any resource, of any ardour, would have swept the dark ray of his pessimism over territory after territory of the varied surface of Nature and human life. But in Maeterlinck it is always the same old scene and the same old story, and whenever he appears it is only to throw up the same old sponge: "*Oh, oh . . . Les tenebres . . . la nuit . . . la lune qui meurt . . . j'ai peur!*" To make up for the tenuity, the monotony, the lack of humanity in these plays Maeterlinck brought all the resources of a consummate producer. The mere music—although it is a music of moans and sighs and shudders—of this alternation of sad speech and hopeless silence is something; it would play on the nerves even were the words no more than a succession of "Ohs" and "Ahs." But the properties were the great thing. Böcklin himself was not more thorough. A great artist might have used novel material; Maeterlinck was as satisfied with the established thing in hearses as Böcklin was. Ruined towers, dungeons, cypresses, deep wells, old kings, shooting stars, marshes, mists, corridors, caves, moons, winds and wailing waters: all the agèd appurtenances of sentimental Romanticism are brought to the rescue. When we see those cypresses we know at once that we have to be melancholy and explanations are unnecessary. Nobody ever made a joke under a cypress or danced in a Gothic corridor:

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at any rate, nobody in literature. And then there were the "incidental" children and the trains of people who were deliberate replicas of each other, and thus produced the effect of life's monotony. There were the seven Beguines in *La Princesse Malsaine*, the seven watchers in *L'Intruse*, the seven princesses, the six old men in *Les Aveugles* — they are all in sixes and sevens. Even the number "seven" has its associations; "symbols" or "properties," whatever you call them, they are all marched on like the animals out of the Ark. And in the end Maeterlinck got sick of it himself.

There is no reason to believe that he underwent a sudden conversion like Huysmans, who changed his literary habits after an intense spiritual struggle. But he did grow tired of writing one play, and that one lopsided. A new era began: the era which has seen him boxing with Carpentier and (probably) buying a large gramophone. "Essayons," he wrote, "de varier l'apparence de l'inconnue, qui nous entoure et d'y découvrir une raison nouvelle de vivre et de persévérer." The fruits of this kindly attempt on his part to temper the despair which the world, at his suggestion, had embraced, and to supply mankind with some reason for prolonging its painful existence, were *Monna Vanna*, *Mary Magdalene* and *The Blue Bird*. The skill and



## Maeterlinck

charm of the *Blue Bird* have made it the most popular of all his works, and it shows all his old gift for effective stage pictures. The two former plays have never been received as masterpieces. They do show a new desire to draw character in conflict and to "substitute will for destiny"; but even his enthusiastic admirer, Miss Taylor, thinks that he has lost more than he has gained by changing styles. Force his plays still lack; and it is lacking also in his prose works. He has a clear and distinguished prose style, and fine powers, when he cares to employ them, of observation and description; the *Life of the Bee* and the sentimental essay on his Dog are very pleasant reading. But the general tone of his prose meditations, as Miss Taylor remarks, is "uniformly mournful," with the old nerveless pessimism of the man who has no fixed attitude, who cannot make up his mind whether or not life is worth taking an interest in, who is always conscious that the *species aeternatis* wears a veil, and broods over the possibility that the face behind the veil may be horrible. How his biographer, in the light of her own account of him, can call him "the sage" passes understanding. He is a sensitive man with a vivid imagination and a fine command over language, which he has never been able to use properly because of the cowardly sentimentality of his emotions and the debility of his thought. His most typical work already

## Books in General

dates in the way that English morbism of the nineties dates. His fellow-Belgian, Verhaeren—sombre enough, but full of courage and of love for humanity and the earth—will be read when Maeterlinck is merely a piece of literary history.

## Literary Publicity in the Future

**N**INE shillings is now the price of a long novel. The seven-and-sixpenny novel had already arrived. All things are returning to prices of which we have heard from our fathers and our grandfathers have told us. Next will come the guinea novel, and ultimately thirty-one-and-six may once more be asked. But we shall not get three volumes for our thirty-one-and-six; bindings and paper are much too precious for that. Meanwhile the humorists who control the great circulating libraries still refuse to face the facts. "You will lose money if you do not charge more for the book? Well, that is your affair. You can't hope to get any more out of us." A few authors they are compelled to take, whatever charge is made; but they always put up a fight. At the bottom of this insistence that this is the year 1913 is the fact that they have declined to put up rates to their own subscribers. They find that they

## Literary Publicity in the Future

can keep going at present as they are, and they are not going to tempt fortune by tinkering with their schedules. It is nothing to them that in the end they will have to give way, and that before the crisis comes the production of new fiction, on which they mainly subsist, may have almost ceased.

The rise in cost of production is being felt in America also. I notice in the August 3rd number of the New York *Nation* an amusing article about a publisher "adept in the gentle art of buttonholing" who is ingeniously trying to temper the wind to the lambs he is about to shear. Thus opens his advertisement.

"You will perhaps consider \$1.75 a very high price to pay for X. It is, but present abnormal conditions would justify my charging a very much higher price for a novel with its relatively limited appeal.

There is a subtle touch in the "relatively limited appeal," and the suggestion is followed up :

"I believe that readers who care for such distinguished novels as X will realize that the cost . . . of the book with a relatively limited appeal must be greater than that of the essentially popular book, and that . . .

## Books in General

they will cheerfully pay the necessary increase. I might say finally that no reduction has been made or contemplated in Mr. (Author's) royalty."

It is very fetching. Buying a select book is put on the same footing as dining at a select restaurant. One stage farther and, by inserting in "social columns" paragraphs such as :

"Lady Alicia Chope, Sir H. Ponsonby-Jambe, Sir Isaac Piccolomini, M.P., the Hons. Peggy and Ursula Rheinault, and Mrs. Macdonald of Glenvommit were amongst those who were yesterday seen buying Miss Calorifica Carlton's new novel."

You might work the book off at two guineas a copy. The American commentator adds that the rule should work both ways, and that we should pay less than we do for "an essentially popular book." And in an era of restrictive legislation he looks forward to the time when the Government, deciding what amount of thrift should be practised by various economic classes,

"will determine that those having \$2,000 a year or less must read Laura Jean Libbey; \$3,000, Robert Chambers; \$4,000, Booth Tarkington or Arnold Bennett; \$5,000, Edith Wharton or H. G. Wells; \$10,000 or more,

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## Literary Publicity in the Future

Joseph Conrad. Millionaires could, of course, afford "special authors"—and Mr. Rockefeller might even have a private author of his own, like King Louis II."

With a really generous and cheerful millionaire such a post would be an attractive one.

The sentence that strikes me most forcibly, however, is: "I might say finally that no reduction has been made or contemplated in Mr. Eagle's royalty." I have written my own name in there just to see how such an advertisement would make me feel. I know what I feel: I feel in my bosom a great anxiety lest this species of advertisement should develop and spread to this side of the Atlantic. Imagination, stimulated by fear, bodies forth visions of advertisements like this:

### DO YOU RESPECT MR. CHUMP? OF COURSE YOU DO!

¶ Has it ever struck you how you can best show your respect for him?

¶ We will tell you.

¶ It is very simple.

¶ All you have to do is to buy as many copies as possible of his new book, *The Infinite: What is Beyond it?* (6s. net.)

FOR

¶ Mr. Chump gets a royalty of 16½ per cent. on the published price of *every copy* of his work that is sold. Every 1s. you spend means 2d. for Mr. Chump. You can therefore regard the purchase of one copy as a share in a national testimonial to the Man you Respect.

## Books in General

Or, going a little way farther along the evolutionary path that all things, in these days, seem to follow :

MR. JUMBO  
GETS A ROYALTY OF **ONLY 10 per cent.**  
WHY ?  
FOR THE **SIMPLE REASON** THAT HIS BOOKS  
**DO NOT SELL.**

It is obvious that if more copies of his books were sold his publisher would be able to give him :—

- (1) Larger royalties.
- (2) More of them.

It is therefore up to you to help, by purchasing Mr. Jumbo's new novel,

**"TOPSY IN THE TUBE."**

Or, to take it one stage farther :

(1) You have heard that Mr. Gustavus Gupp's new novel, *A Little Bit of Stilton*, has been published by the House of Jones ?

(2) What you have not heard is that he could do with far more remuneration than he at present seems likely to get out of it.

(3) He has a wife and six children.

(4) They live in one room, and there is a hole in the roof.

(5) The mattress wants re-covering.

(6) His wife, who is an invalid, has been prescribed Benger's, but cannot afford it.

(7) His tailor is pressing him for payment. We have his assurance that he has not been extravagant about clothes, but that he simply must keep up appearances, as he has frequently to call upon agents, editors and publishers.

(8) He finds that the fact that he is never able to stand anybody a lunch is a great handicap to him in the furtherance of his literary career.

(9) Do you understand now ?

Your most obedient servants,

THE HOUSE OF JONES.

## Diminutive Dramas

If this sort of thing becomes general it is (as the Overseas idiom goes) "Me for New Guinea."

## Diminutive Dramas

IT is not a new thing to write letters from or dialogues between dead or legendary people. Englishmen, Frenchmen, and ancients have done it; possibly Czecho-Slovaks, but I do not know. Lucian was an amusing model; Landor, Lang and Traill are familiar; and some bright correspondence between a great diversity of antique and modern shades was produced by Mr. Thos. Brown, once so popular, now so forgotten, the nearest approach the age of Anne and George produced to the late talented "Pitcher" of the *Pink 'Un*. The possibilities of the form, however, for the purposes of satire and surprise, are not likely to be exhausted. A hundred years hence somebody will be writing dialogues between Robert Browning and Nietzsche. In our own day I do not know anybody who has done the thing better than Mr. Maurice Baring.

Before the war Mr. Baring published three volumes of short, light compositions which in

## Books in General

various fashions put words into the mouths of the dead. These were: *Lost Diaries*, *Dead Letters* and *Diminutive Dramas*. Those who possess them cherish them as men of taste always cherish good books which are not so well known as they ought to be. I think that it was in the first that there appeared the Diary of an English Governess during the French Revolution (she hardly knew the Revolution was on), which a friend back from Petrograd told me was a far more truthful picture of the first year of the Russian Revolution than anything that had been published here; and the second contained *The Mycenæ Papers*, which disclosed the inner history of the Paris and Helen affair. The third, the book of small dramas, some of which are frequently played in America, was, taken all through, the most uniformly amusing of the three. They are all quite as good reading as they were when they first came out in the columns of the *Morning Post*. It seems a long time ago. The South African and Manchurian wars were recent memories; Mr. Baring and Mr. Belloc were each filling weekly columns in the *Post*, Mr. Belloc with *Hills and the Sea* and his other early essays; and on Fridays Andrew Lang, always learned, high-spirited, and combative, frequently highly discursive, thumped a world of antagonists with whom he differed about ghosts, totems, border ballads, and Mary Queen of Scots.



## Diminutive Dramas

Mr. Baring's little plays are all much of a length, and the majority are comic representations, in prose, of historical or legendary characters in action. Æneas parts from Dido, Theseus from Ariadne; Jason wriggles out of his marriage with Medea, Charles VI. plays cards with his family, Xanthippe scolds Socrates whose every answer taps a fresh torrent, Velasquez paints his Venus, Odysseus wheedles Iphigenia into consenting to be sacrificed, Queen Eleanor has a fracas with Fair Rosamund. A few are something other or something more. Some are contemporary and their characters invented. And two are parodies. Of these one is as good a burlesque of Maeterlinck (not a difficult butt) as has ever been written, and in the other Mr. Baring succeeds beautifully in the harder task of writing an Elizabethan play. The subject is the death of Alexander the Great; the manner is the manner not (except here and there) of Shakespeare but of his lesser and more ranting contemporaries. There is a touch of the Marlowe of *Tamerlane*. Alexander's long and eloquent speeches have too much of the old magic to amuse; the parody is most entertaining where the originals are most palpably weak and bombastic. For instance:

STATIRA. *My Lord, I come to say a last  
farewell.  
Perchance the lying mist which seal'd thine eyes*

## Books in General

*Shall dissipate and we may be aton'd ;  
And deaf to false Roxana, thou'lt prefer  
The Royal spouse, and cancel and defy  
Her bastard's claim.*

ROXANA. Hence ! Hence, foul murd'ress,  
hence !

*Thou cursed thief who in the midnight season  
Dost come to filch Great Alexander's soul  
With mixture dire of hellish property.  
Begone ! Thy treason is made palpable,  
Thy baleful juice is harmless as pure water,  
And thy dread weapon, turning on thyself,  
Shall compass thine own ignomy.*

This last word is a good one. I hope it exists.

Two of the best for acting purposes are minute modern comedies. *The Drawback* is a conversation between a pair of lovers in the park, in which a most horrible revelation is made in a tantalisingly mysterious way. *The Greek Vase* is a bitter little scene between an artist and a dealer. *Don Juan's Failure*—Don Juan, drawn precisely as he must have been, comes up against an English ingénue—would also go well. Of the others I fancy for amateur actors *Catherine Parr*, *The Rehearsal*, *After Euripides*, *Electra*, *Calpurnia's Dinner Party*, and *King Alfred's Neat Herd*. The dinner party is especially charming. Cæsar and Calpurnia have arranged a dinner party. To their annoyance they receive an invitation

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## Diminutive Dramas

from Lucullus for the same evening and wish they could put their guests off. But one by one the guests—who have also been asked by the great gastronome—send notes of excuse, excepting Brutus and Portia, whom Lucullus has not asked. The Cæsars decide to put these two off until a later date and go to Lucullus's themselves.

“CÆSAR. That's all right. I will write to Lucullus and say we will come, if he has still got room for us.

“CALPURNIA. Just as you like; but remember that Brutus is touchy and that Portia never forgives.”

Very likely something of that sort *was* at the bottom of the assassination. The sequel is Lucullus's dinner. He has trouble in the kitchen; orders a small exquisite dinner for himself at an early hour; and for his guests sends out to a restaurant. The caterer delivers precisely the dinner left on his hands by the cancelling of Cæsar's party. But no doubt the guests didn't realise it.

*Catherine Parr* is mild farce: a dialogue between Henry VIII. and his last wife as to a watery egg the monarch has been given for breakfast.

“KING HENRY. One would have thought

## Books in General

that a woman of your experience might at least know how to boil an egg. I hate a watery egg. (*Pensively.*) Poor dear Katie used to boil eggs beautifully.

“CATHERINE. Do you mean Catherine Howard or Katharine of Aragon?”

This effort, I think, does not come into the category of dramas in which an attempt has seriously been made to re-create historical characters and scenes. But I think that the scene showing a rehearsal of *Macbeth*, and the part played therein by the modest, amiable, able and adaptable author is almost certainly accurate, and could be studied to advantage by all Shakespeare's biographers.

Shakespeare writes the most beautiful passage in the play to order whilst somebody else is reading his (very small) part. The actors and Burbage behave most thoroughly in character, demanding opportunities, quarrelling about words, suggesting cuts and alterations, getting the same lines wrong repeatedly. This is an extract from this tragic little episode which would go most beautifully as a curtain-raiser :

*Enter MR. BURBAGE, who plays Macbeth.*

“MR. BURBAGE. That scene doesn't go. Now don't you think Macbeth had better walk in his sleep instead of Lady Macbeth?”



## Diminutive Dramas

"THE STAGE MANAGER. That's an idea.

"THE PRODUCER. I think the whole scene might be cut. It's quite unnecessary.

"LADY MACBETH. Then I shan't come on in the whole of the fifth act. If that scene's cut I shan't play at all.

"THE STAGE MANAGER. We're thinking of transferring the scene to Macbeth. (*To the AUTHOR.*) It wouldn't need much altering. Would you mind rewriting that scene, Mr. Shakespeare? It wouldn't want much alteration. You'd have to change that line about Arabia. Instead of this 'little hand,' you might say: 'All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this horny hand.' I'm not sure it isn't more effective.

"THE AUTHOR. I'm afraid it might get a laugh.

"MR. BURBAGE. Not if I play it.

"THE AUTHOR. I think it's more likely that Lady Macbeth would walk in her sleep, but——"

I wish that with his gift for comic writing Mr. Baring would attempt something on the same lines as these dramas but a little longer.

## The Trials of Booksellers

CRISES are always bad for the book-trade. The outbreak of peace will be as bad as the outbreak of war. The public buys books most when it is in a placid or a bored frame of mind. When you are excitedly exchanging your baseless speculations about foreign affairs with your neighbours or telling your uncle what you have heard from somebody else's secretary's brother; when you are dreading the ruin of civilisation or glimpsing its salvation; when you are in a state of frenzied suspense, when you are badly wanting to kill somebody, when important events are happening, or about to happen, you do not buy books and you cannot settle down to read—save only in the way of a soporific after you are in bed. Probably, therefore, the bookshops have not had a very good time this week; and such customers as they have had have been restless and difficult to satisfy. Nobody, at a moment like this, will want to buy war-books; few people will feel equal to reprints of the classics; and only those who are very detached indeed will be capable of reading novels about the divorce-cases of duchesses in Mayfair (popular) or clerks in Clapham (intellectual).

Desirous to support these cloudy assertions

## The Trials of Booksellers

with some new and original facts, I went out with the intention of visiting two or three booksellers with whom I am accustomed to converse when I want to know how the trade is doing. Experience is necessary in dealing with them. They have to be translated, interpreted. When they are not doing well they say, "Terrible, terrible"; when they are getting on nicely they say, "Not so bad, but nobody seems to want anything but sevenpennies"; and when they are sending messengers hourly to the bank with great bags full of notes and silver they say, "Nothing to complain about." Unfortunately the catechism I had prepared was not used, for I wandered into Charing Cross Road and found that not all my perturbations about Prince Max and Lithuania would keep me out of the second-hand bookshops.

And having got there I stayed there. And, while I stayed there, I kept my eyes open. I did not talk, for I did not feel the impulse. The second-hand booksellers, who are a patient race, usually answer questions with "Oh, so-so." So I did not question them. But a quarter of an hour's stay in each of four shops considerably increased my admiration for them. Fate so arranged it that each shop was visited during my sojourn by an unusual number of complete dolts. The first specimen was, I regret to say, a very spruce captain

## Books in General

in uniform. He walked up to the withered and wrinkled sage at the desk and said (on this occasion I am positively not lying) : " I want a book published by — — — and Co. in 1881 ; I don't remember its name." Instead of arguing with him the wise merchant said point-blank (practice must mean a lot) that he hadn't got it, and the optimist went out quite satisfied. Next came a young woman asking for Clay on Economics. This baffled the bookseller completely. Very likely he was not sure what Economics were (for his shop never contains many technical books), and he obviously hadn't the ghost of an idea who Clay was. Nor had the lady, apparently ; nor had I, unless she meant Sir Arthur Clay, who once wrote an extremely inadequate book on Syndicalism. With sustained politeness the bookseller fended off this attack also. Within two minutes in came another lady. Her question was more easily answered, but perhaps a little comprehensive. " Have you," she asked, " any novels ? " " Who by ? " said the man ; for the shop was full of them. " Oh, any novels." She was taken to a shelf where she began toying with the works of Dostoievsky, Garvice, Stendhal, Ethel Dell, Bennett and Phillips Oppenheim, and when I left the shop her fingers were still fluttering indecisively over the rows of faded backs.

In the next shop the first customer was



## The Trials of Booksellers

more interesting: a British private soldier, short, stubby, with a red face, low brow, and tousled black hair. "What on earth," I thought, "is this man going to buy? Perhaps he is going to learn the alphabet." When he spoke I was humiliated. "Have you got," he said, "any Russian books in Russian?"—and I was sorry to see him go out with so ambitious a craving unsatisfied. One or two more ordinary creatures (none of whom, I may add, got what they wanted) were followed by yet another captain, black-moustached, middle-aged, and good-looking in rather an obtuse way. He said: "Have you got any books of American poetry?" "Whose?" "A collection I mean." "Any particular collection?" "No." "What period?" It was plain that the gentleman—I hazarded that he wished to present a book to an American girl, for I couldn't think of any other solution—hadn't at first the foggiest idea what to say. He stood and gaped. He looked around him, cleared his throat, and frowned as though in deep thought. But then he had a brain-wave. "About the time of the Civil War, I should think," he said. For he had heard of the Civil War, and it marked a date. The bookseller had no collections of American poetry, either of that or of any other period. He said so and told the man, who looked extremely disappointed at this check, that he thought

## Books in General

the Clarendon Press published one. So out went he.

The procession continued. There were people who wanted just those medical books that were not there. There were aspiring youths who were seeking precisely those works about engineering and card-indexing that the bookseller had just sold. There was a middle-aged lady who said, "I want a copy of Omar Khayyam" (it wasn't there, but she could have got one new for a shilling), and there were several people who seemed merely to want advice. Once or twice there came somebody like myself, a hardened prowler, who said nothing but started nosing about the shelves on his own account. But, old and young, robust and puny, clear-eyed and spectacled, bestial and austere, scholarly and illiterate, they all had this one thing in common—that they did not buy anything.

It then came over me that the number of persons who buy something in these shops must be a very small percentage of those who walk in, formulate a want which cannot be met, and go out again. I felt compassion for the booksellers who have to suffer so many fools with the nearest possible approach to a show of gladness, and in at least nineteen cases out of twenty are unable to do a deal even with the reasonable and intelligent.

## Ruskin

It occurred to me that I had been in three shops before this one ; that I had three times walked off with catalogues and twice had the electric light turned up for me ; and that during the whole time the mere fact that I had not seen anything which I wanted had prevented me from making a single purchase. "I simply must buy something here," I said to myself. So, seeing a book marked at one-and-ninepence which I could sell any day for three or four pounds, I took it down, paid for it, and went away with a conscience appeased. As Sir Robert Baden-Powell tells his Scouts, it is one's duty to do at least one good deed every day.

Ruskin : Feb., 1919

ON Saturday afternoon, at the Royal Society of Arts, a public meeting will be held to commemorate the centenary of the birth of John Ruskin. Lord Bryce will be in the chair, and Professor Mackail will deliver an address : that is to say, provided that on Saturday Lord Bryce and Professor Mackail find themselves in places whence access to the Adelphi is still possible. There will be other speakers, and the charge for admission will be one shilling.

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It is not a good time for centenary or any other celebrations. There is a Peace on. We are besieged by a thousand problems, involved in a thousand crises (these figures remind me of Gibbon's champion hyperbole: "A thousand swords were plunged at once into the bosom of the unfortunate Probus"); the strikes make it almost impossible to move about, and the weather makes us wish that it were really quite impossible. President Wilson, M. Lenin, Sir Albert Stanley and Mr. J. Bromley, with numbers of others, stand in the foreground obscuring the retreating shade of John Ruskin, and there has been very little in the papers about him. Even at the best of moments Ruskin would not get as much commemorative attention as he would have done had his anniversary fallen ten or fifteen years ago. He has gone completely out of fashion, even more so, I dare say, than Carlyle: though not as much as Herbert Spencer, who, however, can scarcely be described as a man of letters. *Unto This Last*, in cheap editions, remains, and deserves to remain, popular with working men who read. The educated appear to consider it old-fashioned and trite (though it contains many fundamental truths clearly put): we have travelled far since the *Cornhill* stopped its serial publication in the middle, owing to its shocking revolutionism. Possibly *The Crown of Wild Olive* and *Sesame and Lilies* still

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## Ruskin

circulate, and *The Stones of Venice* and *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* have been reprinted, and are presumably sold to some extent, in several cheap series. But I doubt if Ruskin's publisher would dispute that his works as a whole are very little read.

There is a great deal of it. Much of it is in rather a scolding tone; he dogmatizes a great deal about controversies in which his dogmatism helped the truth but which are now so old and seem so simple that his confident tone rather repels; he often saw one neglected aspect of truth so vividly that he was blind to others; he approved things in Turner that he would not tolerate in Whistler; he preached at enormous length and he extensively pamphleteered. "Long-winded eloquence" is out of fashion, so is resounding prose, especially when it is, as much of Ruskin's is, very carefully fabricated. Above all, his work was, in its main themes, largely critical; and the critical work of a past age, however good, however splendidly written, has a hard struggle to survive outside the histories. Nevertheless, though the future may certainly prefer to read Ruskin in selections, it is not conceivable that the present affectation to despise so great a writer and so fine a spirit will persist. This generation may be tired of Ruskin, but the next will return to his noblest things with a new pleasure. He had

## Books in General

an ear, passion, exquisite sensibilities, a wonderful eye for the minutest and the grandest of the coloured forms of Nature: and he made some of the most magnificent things in English prose, passages like the lament over St. Mark's, unsurpassed descriptions of pictures, landscapes, trees, flowers, and the stored bright memories of the brain, in which every kind of appeal, sensuous and emotional and intellectual, is made to the reader who responds to beauty: passages of which those which are least successful are so often because they are too tightly packed with substance. And, when one reads some of his more intimate and personal confessions, one is puzzled to know why it is that his poems are so flat and uninspired. Let me quote, not one of the most hackneyed pages, but a passage from an address delivered at Cambridge in which he describes the ruined villa of Cardinal Maurice of Savoy:

“So stands this palace of pleasure; desolate as it deserves—desolate in smooth corridor and glittering chamber—desolate in pleached walk and planted bower—desolate in that worst and bitterest abandonment which leaves no light of memory. . . . Nothing is here but the vain apparellings of pride sunk into dishonour, and vain appanages of delight now no more delightsome. The hill waters, that once flowed and plashed through the garden

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## W. M. Rossetti

fountains, now trickle sadly through the weeds that encumber their basins, with a sound as of tears : creeping, insidious, neglected flowers weave their burning nets about the white marble of the balustrades and rend them slowly stone from stone : the thin sweet-scented leaves tremble along the old masonry joints as if with palsy at every breeze ; and the dark lichens, golden and grey, make the footfall silent in the path's centre.

“ And day by day as I walk there, the same sentence seems whispered by every shaking leaf and every dying echo, of garden and chamber :—‘ Thus end all the arts of life only in death ; and thus issue all the gifts of man, only in his dishonour, when they are pursued or possessed in the service of pleasure only.’ ”

## W. M. Rossetti

**W**ILLIAM MICHAEL ROSSETTI, who died on Wednesday, was one of the last of Ruskin's intimate friends. He was in his ninetieth year, and published his last book, I think, when he was eighty. I never saw him, and he was not the kind of man about whom anecdotes clustered. His literary work, principally concerned with the Pre-Raphaelite Movement, was competent,

## Books in General

but no more. He wrote a dull, very loyal, biography of his brother Gabriel, and it was to his credit that he (with Swinburne) forced the public to study Blake when Blake was neglected. He was friendly with almost all the Victorian great, a safe friend who had no illusions about his own powers. As a man of letters he lived, to a large extent, upon his golden prime when he was one of the seven members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and edited the *Germ*, most famous of ephemeridæ and now worth its weight in gold. But he was also one of the band of scholars who worked devotedly and patiently during the nineteenth century at restoring the text, and increasing the reputation, of Shelley, urged on to this by his associates who were too busily engaged in original work to do more than encourage him. He was not perhaps the best of those who worked this field. He can hardly be ranked above Mr. Harry Buxton Forman. But this is a branch of literary work which can best be carried out by what may be called independent collaborators; and W. M. Rossetti's edition has its place in the development of Shelley's text. A legend was set about some time ago that he was really the poet of the family, and that he sacrificed his gift to the no doubt arduous duty of looking after his unbusinesslike brother and sister. This has an air of romantic tragedy about it which makes one want to believe it.



## Literary Hoaxes

But I am afraid it has no foundation in fact. His poems have been published (two small volumes of sonnets on democracy only twelve or thirteen years ago) and they offer no support for the theory.

## Literary Hoaxes

LET us recapitulate the facts. The *Times* published a poem signed "Rudyard Kipling," and entitled *The Old Volunteer*. It ran as follows :

*I can hear the bugle calling  
And it don't want me,  
While the superannuation-chap  
O' Germany  
'S a fighting for the Kaiser in  
His Fatherland ;  
But our order's for the young 'uns  
O' the old Brass-Band.*

*We were ready in the 'nineties,  
When the call rang clear  
For the yeoman and the gentleman  
To volunteer,  
Awaiting for the enemy  
On nine days' drill ;  
But the Army wants recruits,  
Not the old Free-Will.*

## Books in General

*We can stay a long duration,  
Though the doctor said  
How " 'The Office' would be worried when  
You drop down dead" ;  
But there'll be a better Judgment for  
The Last Relay :  
I shall hear the bugle calling,  
And I'll march that Day.*

I take the liberty of reproducing it bodily, for the simple reason that the *Times* cannot have acquired the copyright from the author—and that author, whose copyright I am infringing, is not likely to proceed against me. Within a few hours of publication the *Times* received a letter from Mr. Kipling, stating that he did not write the poem. His letter was not printed ; possibly the *Times* did not like to print it ; all we saw was a brief statement of the facts, and an assurance that Printing House Square was doing its utmost to track the forger to his lair.

The *Times* apologised to Mr. Kipling and its readers. It could not with decency do less ; it could not with safety attempt more. The situation is rich. The parody—although it does contain a mixture of banality and obscurity such as often characterises Mr. Kipling's topical poems—is not a close parody, and falls well below Mr. Kipling's lowest level. It is, in fact, horrible stuff. Even the

## Literary Hoaxes

*Times* must have known this. But it must pretend not to ; otherwise it would be admitting that it is willing to print even the worst rubbish if a well-known signature is under it. But neither explanation nor reticence, no words and no silences, can make the salient fact other than it is : that the *Times* really thought Mr. Kipling wrote this stuff, and that Mr. Kipling knows it. An apology may cover the innocent abuse of Mr. Kipling's signature ; but no apology can wipe out the insult to his pen. He now knows that, in the opinion of professed admirers, he was quite *liable* to write *The Old Volunteer*. I think he ought to write a poem about the *Times*.

It is a wonder that this sort of thing is not done more often. If work is topical there is frequently no time to send proofs to authors ; and editors cannot spend their days telegraphing to ask people if signatures are genuine. But mistakes so thoroughly awkward as this could not be common. Real balderdash would not as a rule be printed unless it bore a signature of the first celebrity ; and an ordinary author would not have a serious grievance if a plausible forgery with some intrinsic merit found its way into print. There are several clever parodists in the country, and, were they sufficiently perverse and leisured, they could bag dozens of editors

## Books in General

a week with forgeries. What would happen if they all started work on a large scale may be left to the imagination.

But if one really has a taste for taking people in, the mere casual bamboozling of simple editors, which is exposed in a day and leads nowhere, is poor sport compared with other kinds of literary forgery. The real thing is the thing that "makes a difference" and reverberates for months and years. The late eighteenth century was the great epoch for this. I fancy that they were all in the department of fine letters; nobody, as far as I know, has taken the learned world in with spurious economic documents or charters. There were Chatterton's Rowley manuscripts. There was Macpherson's *Ossian*, in which many people believed for years, although others saw through them almost at once—including Dr. Johnson, who wrote the impostor a letter telling him that he would "never be deterred from detecting what I think a cheat by the menaces of a ruffian." As a climax came Mr. Samuel William Henry Ireland, son of a second-hand bookseller, who, while still in his teens, forged a Shakespeare autograph. This succeeding, he produced letters, marginal notes and locks of hair, hoodwinking, amongst others, Dr. Parr and Joseph Wharton; his last *coup* was the concoction of a historical play, *Vortigern*,



## Literary Hoaxes

which Sheridan produced at Drury Lane. Had that not brought the world about his ears he would have gone on filling up the gaps in Shakespeare's historical series. John Payne Collier, who followed in his footsteps, was at once more careful, more competent, and less aspiring. He contented himself with bogus textual emendations, false entries in catalogues, and such small deer. It was years before he was finally exposed, and it was not until after his death that it became quite certain that he was a fraud and not a dupe.

The worst of all these people, however, is that their forgeries were perpetrated either because they were in a hurry to get famous, or because they had theories to support, or a chronic mental kink. Ireland may have relished his meteoric career to some extent; but none of those forgers was the type of man who could most enjoy literary fabrication—namely, the level-headed leg-puller. No great English literary fraud has been conceived and carried out in the spirit of that French hoax which amused the World before the War. A French paper invented a great educationist, Hégésippe Simon, "The Precursor"; and sent to its political opponents in Parliament a circular saying that a statue was "at last" to be erected in Simon's honour, and asking them to join the committee. The appeal was headed by the very foolish

## Books in General

“quotation” from Hégésippe: “The darkness vanishes when the sun rises,” but thirty Senators and Deputies, agreeing that it was a scandal that the Precursor’s memory should have been so neglected, joined the committee. Their names were published, and they were revealed as humbugs. That is the really good fraud—the fraud that exposes the pretentious, sends the dull on wild-goose chases, sets the pedants by the ears disputing with acrimony about something that does not matter, or induces the slaves of æsthetic fashion to commit themselves to a demonstrably misplaced admiration. Had Mr. Kipling been away beyond reach of papers, and had *The Old Volunteer* thus had a month’s run, depend upon it one would have stout fellows who would have proclaimed even that as a masterpiece. And that—as fabrication—was clumsy compared with what a really skilful practitioner could have turned out. I suppose the reason that more people do not amuse themselves with this kind of swindle is that to do the thing well and keep it up for any length of time one has to take so much pains about forging incidental evidence. This is a great check—or safeguard.

## The Election of 1918

### The Election of 1918

**I**T is rather difficult to keep one's thoughts on books this week, even for an hour or two. The howls of the parties are so loud that it is impossible to avoid distraction. Who is the happy man who, in a week like this, can lock himself up with Jane Austen, S. Thomas Aquinas, Petronius or Robert Bridges, and forget, not merely "ten counties overhung with smoke," but a hundred counties overhung with gas? The volleying shouts of Ministers and journalists thunder in at my windows: "Kill the Kaiser!" "Bleed the Huns!" "Bring Back Bottomley!" "Expel them All!" "We Propose to Abolish Conscription as Soon as We Abolish It!" "We shall Make Germany Pay for the Whole of the War except that Part for which We Shall Not Make Her Pay!" "Mr. Lloyd George Won the War!" "Colonel Grant Morden Won the War!" I have my views; they can briefly be summarised in the phrase: "I don't believe a word of it"; but even if I had not I might pardonably find it difficult to write an essay, to talk, or even to copy extracts out of somebody else's books, in such circumstances.

I remember that during the progress of the

## Books in General

Housing and Town Planning Bill, which (the late) Mr. John Burns "piloted" through the House of Commons, some enthusiast kept on butting in, pleading for more parks and larger gardens. Mr. Burns retaliated with a reference to "some honourable members whose heads are full of open spaces." I now sympathise with those members. It is precisely what I feel like. I have read nothing but newspapers and election addresses for a week; my brain, erst so agile, curious and far-travelling, has revolved and revolved round the chances of the election and the Delphic utterances of Ministers. In the few comparatively detached half-hours I have had, I have attempted some stories by O. Henry, a new and ambitious novel by that great shocker, Mr. Sax Rohmer, and (as a soporific) Hobbes's *Leviathan*. But my thoughts even then were present yet absent; I could not concentrate; I have nothing to say. At another and a less feverish time I might have attempted to "re-estimate" O. Henry, and extract the fine flower of his most characteristic remarks, such as that which describes a man as having a snore "which would have sent everybody in San Francisco hiking for the parks." You remember that they have had earthquakes in San Francisco. I might alternatively have discussed the works of Mr. Rohmer: *Dr. Fu-Manchu*, *The Yellow Claw*, *The Si-Fan Mysteries*, *Brood of the Witch*



## Cecil Chesterton

*Queen*, and others, to which I do not think I have ever referred here before, but which have often sent me to sleep happily with the feeling that the world might be much more horrible than it actually is. And, at my most lucid and analytical, I might even have meditated on the strange brain of Thos. Hobbes of Malmesbury, who frequently wrote very fine English. But not now. There is an election on, and within forty-eight hours of this present hour I shall be walking up to some school, as yet undiscovered, in some back street, making a cross on a piece of paper, resisting the strong impulse to add a few objurgatory comments about a candidate whom I do not like, and dropping the finished article in the box. For the first time in my life. In the past I have moved houses too often, and always at the wrong time. It is the sort of thing that happens to literary men.

## Cecil Chesterton

**C**ECIL CHESTERTON has died in France of pneumonia. He did not die in the trenches, but of no man could it more truthfully be said that he died for his country. When he first presented himself for military service the doctors wanted to turn him down, and he had to argue his way

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into the Army ; and after that he deliberately set himself the job of getting himself raised through the lower medical categories to a condition of physical fitness which would enable him to be sent abroad. He hated what his brother has called the Barbarism of Berlin, and he wanted to take his share in ending it.

His political opinions are not a subject for discussion on this page ; one did not always agree either with his diagnosis of the situation or with his methods of attack. But it is correct to say that, leaving the nature of his argument out of account, there was no better arguer, no abler journalist, in England. He had a controversial style which was unique. He knew what he meant ; he had convictions and a thesis ; and he said what he had to say with astonishing strength and lucidity. His prodigious memory gave him a great store of illustration and quotation to draw on ; but he never dragged a reference in by the heels. His sense of humour was never in doubt ; but his jokes were all strictly relevant and developed in the course of his argument ; he drove straight ahead, his sentences brief and muscular, his words accurate and full of flavour. He always had something to say, and he said it in a way which always made him readable. He descended from Swift, through Cobbett and Huxley, and every man

## Cecil Chesterton

who knew him must regret that he has left no memorial more permanent than a few topical political commentaries. He wrote a book called *Gladstonian Ghosts* (he strongly disliked the Liberal Party), and he collaborated with Mr. Belloc in *The Party System*, which looked like an extravaganza, but contained much truth.

It is a common and an obvious thing to say when a man dies that he has left nobody behind him who can quite fill his place. But of Cecil Chesterton this is true. It is not a question of his contribution to political thought—though he at least stood for courage in politics and the hatred of powerful corruption; it is a question of personality. People who knew him slightly, or by repute, often assumed that his chief characteristics were a love of jollification and a belief in the social value of beer. Nothing could be more hopelessly off the tracks. He liked taverns; but when he was in a tavern he spent half his time totally oblivious of the tankard in his hand. He was never happy except when discussing an intellectual problem; and I should not be surprised to learn that even during his last illness he expounded theology or politics to the doctors at his bedside. He would stand in a Fleet Street bar, a short, stout, jovial figure, emphatically beating the one hand with the other, elucidating Roman dogma, explain-

## Books in General

ing the precise limits of the theory, and the ascertained facts, of evolution in Darwin and the Post-Darwinians; sketching the Constitution of the United States; analysing what he thought the decay of English institutions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; or rolling out the most resounding passages in Shakespeare or Swinburne, Huxley or Newman. He was totally free from self-consciousness; he made no difference between one audience and another; if the people in the bar cared to listen, they might; as a private soldier he probably discoursed to his fellow privates in precisely the same way as he did to his literary companions; and I would not mind betting that he interested and amused them, and that they liked and respected him. The *New Witness*, under his editorship, was frequently extravagant, intolerant, inaccurate and unjust; but it often told truths that no one else would tell; for its editor was afraid of nobody, in fact scarcely understood what fear was.

## Three Relics

**E**NORMOUS sums are paid for the manuscripts of the great; but if I collected such things, I think I should be more inclined to take pity on the remains of those



### Three Relics

secondary persons whom the market so brutally ignores. The other day I occupied an hour before breakfast—what hour that was is nobody's affair but mine—with several catalogues which came by one post. In one of them—Scottish—I found that the manuscript of Talfourd's *Ion* was offered for sale.

Truly a rarity. I presume there is only one manuscript in existence. Mr. Serjeant Talfourd was a person of importance in his day, with whom Lamb parleyed. He edited Lamb's letters; and this very tragedy contested with Sir Henry Taylor's *Philip van Artevelde* the position of the most celebrated and respectable poetic drama of its age. It had its little day; it was read and acted; its name is in all the histories. But nobody wants to read or act it now; and the holograph original of the text is going for—four guineas! You can get a manuscript sonnet of Hartley Coleridge's for one guinea; but a sonnet is not a drama.

In another catalogue, I found all sorts of amusing things. One letter which is offered is likely, I should think, to amuse other people more than the author. A batch of letters addressed to David and Alfred Nutt, the publishers, is on sale; amongst others, a letter from a well-known living author regarding terms offered—"I am, of course, sorry that neither you nor Vigo St. would go higher."

## Books in General

One cannot blame a bookseller for selling letters that he buys; but I must say that I should not like to think that my publisher, or his legatees, or anybody about his office, proposed to vend in Charing Cross Road the letters which, from time to time, I address to him. When a man is dead he is fair game; the business letters of the living ought not to be hawked about like this. This, however, is by the way; the lots that really interest me are two which one would have thought would have been very greatly valued by collectors of (ugh!) Walpoliana, Wordsworthiana and Coleridgiana.

Lot 196, offered by Mr. Dobell, is described as follows:

“196 MONTAGU (Basil) A Manuscript of Extraordinary Interest: being Basil Montagu's narrative of the birth and upbringing of his son, Basil C., with copies of Basil C. Montagu's letters to his Step-Mother, sm. 4to, half bound, £4 4s.

“This manuscript unfolds a most pathetic story. Basil Montagu married in April, 1791, and his wife died in giving birth to a son, Basil C., in 1793. Basil became acquainted with Wordsworth, who took the child with him into Dorsetshire, where he lived with Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy until

### Three Relics

they settled at Grasmere. Basil C. then went to live with his mother's sister, with the Rev. Mr. Lane in Cambridge, and with Admiral Montagu, where he determined to be a Midshipman and entered the Navy, but was sent home an invalid in 1812; he then went to stay with various friends and finally settled at Ambleside. His father declares with the greatest earnestness that all these friends and benefactors treated Basil C. with the utmost kindness and consideration, but Basil C. in every case turned upon his benefactors with calumny and abuse and charges of harsh treatment. His father attributes this ungrateful conduct to a diseased mind.

“The book is full of allusions to Wordsworth, of whom Basil speaks in the highest terms, but his son, apparently without any real ground of complaint, vilified Wordsworth and his sister, accusing them of having treated him very cruelly.”

Now, to anyone who is familiar with—take the standard books—Harper's *Wordsworth*, Dykes Campbell's *Coleridge*, Lucas's *Lamb* or Crabb Robinson's *Diary*, Basil Montagu is a familiar character, a man to a certain extent interesting in himself, and any of whose references to Wordsworth are worth having, though they may not be reliable. He is quite a large figure in the picture of the Lake Poets;

## Books in General

he was, moreover, undeliberately, at the bottom of the curious rupture between Coleridge and Wordsworth, which made the perfect re-establishment of their old relations for ever impossible. Almost any manuscript of his would, one had thought, be welcomed by somebody; this particular MS. would grace many collections. But it is going at half the price of a cheap suit of clothes; the value of first-class manuscripts soars and soars, but the others seem to choke each other.

For me, however, if I were to acquire either, it would, I think, be the other, described as follows :

“ 123 HERTFORD (F. Seymour Conway, *first Marquis, second creation, 1719-94*). A Collection of over Eighty Autograph Letters, 1766-85; also about Twenty from his son, the second Marquis, 1794-1803, all probably addressed to William B. Clarke, of Ipswich, in a vol, 4to, half bound, £2 2s.

Why, you may ask, should one want letters addressed to Mr. Clarke, of Ipswich, by a Marquis of Hertford, even the first Marquis of the second creation? If you have read—failing which you have one of the greatest pleasures in store—Horace Walpole's letters, you have apparently forgotten how many of



### Three Relics

those letters were addressed to the Conways, Lord Hertford and his brother the General, to whom for me (and to his Countess of Ailesbury) the most charming of fragrances clings. Horace's letters to this family are always delightful; the reflected picture one gets of their existences, particularly the younger Conway household, is almost idyllic; he speaks of the group with a degree of affection that he showed to few. "My dearest Harry," he writes in 1761, "how could you write me such a cold letter as I have just received from you, and beginning *Dear Sir!* Can you be angry with me, for can I be in fault to you? Blameable in ten thousand other respects, may not I almost say I am perfect with regard to you? Since I was fifteen, have not I loved you unalterably? . . . Oh, Harry! if you knew what I have felt and am feeling about you, would you charge me with neglect"? For Horace Walpole, this is a paroxysm of emotion; Conway was abroad at the wars, the misunderstanding (if it existed) was a nothing. Twenty years later, he writes from Strawberry Hill about the rest of the family:

"Your nephew George is arrived with the fleet: my door opened t'other morning; I looked towards the common horizon of heads, but was a foot and a half below any face. The handsomest giant in the world made but one step across my room, and seizing my

## Books in General

hand, gave it such a robust grip, that I squalled; for he crushed my poor chalk-stones to powder. When I had recovered from the pain of his friendly salute, I said, 'It must be George Conway? and yet, is it possible? Why, it is not fifteen months ago since you was but six feet high.' In a word, he is within an inch of Robert and Edward, with larger limbs; almost as handsome as Hugh, with all the bloom of youth; and, in short, another of those comely sons of Anak, the breed of which your brother and Lady Hertford have piously restored for the comfort of the daughters of Sion."

Somewhere, they have preserved Lord Hertford's letters this century and more; and now, they are going for sixpence each!

Looking up these references (for even journalists look up the quotations they trot out with such superb ease), I fell upon other things in the letters to the Conways. The Countess is being asked to Lichfield: "If you love a prospect, or bacon, you will certainly come hither." Harry Conway is to be visited during a typical English summer: "I am in no fear of not finding you in perfect verdure; for the sun, I believe, is gone a great way off to some races or other, where his horses are to run for the King's plate; we have not heard of him in this neighbourhood." The

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## John Clare

King of Prussia's birthday is being celebrated ;  
everybody (says Horace) is being made to  
sing *The Roast Beef of Old Germany*.

## John Clare

**J**OHAN CLARE (I will explain presently)  
was born near Peterborough in 1793.  
His father was an extremely poor and  
rheumatic agricultural labourer, who in his  
latter days lived on the parish. The son  
followed his father's calling and, when his  
first book was published, was living with his  
parents in penury which he describes in an  
*Address to Plenty*. This "address," contains  
vivid lines :

*Toiling in the naked fields,  
Where no bush a shelter yields,  
Needy Labour dithering stands,  
Beats and blows his numbing hands ;  
And upon the crumping snows,  
Stamps, in vain, to warm his toes.*

He taught himself, with slight assistance, to  
read ; and bought books by working late.  
At thirteen he began to write, under the  
influence of Thomson's *Seasons* ; at twenty-  
four he lost a job on a limekiln through his

## Books in General

habit of writing during working hours ; and when he was twenty-eight a Stamford bookseller ran across some of his manuscripts and arranged the publication of a volume with a London firm. The London firm was Taylor and Hessey, who were at the time much mixed up with the subsequently famous. They published, *inter alia*, Keats's *Lamia*. They were not a very successful or lasting firm. Clare's first book was called *Poems, Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*. It ran at once into several editions. I have a copy before me now.

There is a long introduction by a well-wisher. It is very remarkable. Its tone is even more patronising than that of Southey's introduction to the "Effusions" of Jones, the Derbyshire Butler ; and no reader can fail to be struck by the change which has come over our manners, in a hundred years. The Introducer was clearly a man of feeling ; he admired Clare's self-help, and he was indignant that the poor after a life of labour should have nothing before them but the poorhouse or a pittance of out-relief. But his pomposity and condescension are wonderful. One is well prepared by platitudes like this :

" There is, perhaps, no feeling so distressing to the individual as that of Genius thus struggling in vain for sounds to convey an idea of

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## John Clare

its almost intolerable sensations . . . and that this would have been Clare's fate, *unless he had been taught to write*, cannot be doubted."

He was short of words, though. "From the want of a due supply of these, and from his ignorance of grammar, he seems to labour under great disadvantages." He had other disadvantages, including his practice of jotting down his inspirations out of doors, "his hat serving him for a table"; and the fact that "from a hole in the wall of his room, where he stuffed his manuscripts, a piece of paper was often taken to hold the kettle with or light the fire." He loved Nature. "His labour in the fields through all seasons, it might be thought, would have disgusted him with those objects which he so much admired at first." But no, this did not happen; nor had his status led to "distressing and revolting alloys" debasing his native worth. "When we hear the consciousness of possessing talent, and the natural irritability of the poetic temperament, pleaded in extenuation of the follies and vices of men in high life, let it be accounted no mean praise to such a man as Clare, that, with all the excitements of *their* sensibility in *his* station, he has preserved a fair character, amid dangers which presumption did not create, and difficulties which discretion could not avoid." But it was to be hoped that society would

## Books in General

not conspire to ruin him by giving him too much money at once :

“The lower the condition of its possessor, the more unfavourable generally has been the effect of genius on his life. That this has not been the case with Clare may, perhaps, be imputed to the absolute depression of his fortune. It is certain that he has not had the opportunity hitherto of being injured by prosperity ; and, that he may escape in future, it is hoped that those persons who intend to show him kindness will not do it suddenly or partially, but so as it will yield him permanent benefit.”

Poor Clare ! Humble man though he may have been, he must have felt strangely when he saw these solicitous sentiments descending on him from the upper air. It was very well. Nobody spoiled him. His later books were neglected ; his royalties and the doles he got from the Civil List and the Literary Fund were very small, and broken and miserable he died in the county asylum at the age of seventy-one. In lucid intervals of his madness he wrote his best verses. He improved as he went ; but even in the early book there were unmistakable sparks. His observation of Nature was close, and (as with that phrase “crumping snows”) he frequently found the new, happy and exact

## John Clare

epithet. And the scenes he wrote about were scenes he had discovered for himself, not scenes selected for him by the romantic passion or idyllic fancy of previous writers: marshy pastures, bean-fields, partridges in stubble, martens flitting round a pond, "their snowy breasts bedaub'd with dirt," geese "gabbling home," "poking hens" settling down on their obscure rafters, mowing and hay-making. He had an eye and tastes rather like those of Edward Thomas, who found beauty in country commonplaces, a group of nettles by an old stone roller in the corner of a farmyard, or the dust of a road pitted by the first drops of a shower. Unfortunately, Clare had submitted himself to bad literary influences.

But why, you ask, have I chosen to start writing about Clare, all out of nothing? There is no new fashion for him; nobody has just written to tell the *Times* Supplement that he was born six months earlier than had been supposed; nobody has published a new edition of his works. What, then, is the excuse for discussing an author so thoroughly non-topical? There is no excuse, but there is an explanation. I had just seen a poem about a Glow-Worm; I remembered that Clare had done one, too; and I looked it up. But it proved not so good as I had hoped. The sight of the pale "glimmering light" "tipping" grass spears and "bedeck-

## Books in General

ing dangling brier" obviously moved him much as it did his modern successor. But he began his sonnet with :

*Tasteful illumination of the night,*

which is a line which, save in the way of flippancy, the other poet would hardly venture to commit. It appears next to a poem on *The Ant*. This also has an unprepossessing first line ; but the poem, in spite of its banalities, is the work of a man who has seen an ant, not of a secluded and unobservant moralist :

*Thou little Insect, infinitely small,*

*What curious texture marks thy minute frame !  
How seeming large thy foresight, and withal,*

*Thy labouring talents not unworthy fame,  
To raise such monstrous hills along the plain,*

*Larger than mountains, when compared with  
thee ;*

*To drag the crumb dropp'd by the village swain,  
Huge size to thine, is strange indeed to me.*

*But that great Instinct which foretells the cold,*

*And bids to guard 'gainst winter's wasteful  
power,*

*Endues this mite with cheerfulness to hold*

*Its toiling labours through the sultry hour :*

*So that same soothing power, in misery,*

*Cheers the poor Pilgrim to Eternity.*

It is fair to add that sonnets ending with the word "eternity" were not so common then as they have since become.



## Mrs. Grundy and Don Juan

### Mrs. Grundy and Don Juan

WHERE does the term "Mrs. Grundy" come from? Were one a thoroughly reflective being the thought would have occurred to one before; but to me, though I have continually seen and heard it all my life, it had never occurred. With a shock of pleasure I came upon the derivation suddenly in the *Encyclopædia*. Mrs. Grundy first appeared, or rather did not appear, in a play called *Speed the Plough* (1798), by Thomas Morton. Dame Ashfield, one of the characters, habitually referred to Mrs. Grundy (a sort of Mrs. Harris in the background) as the criterion of respectability. "What would Mrs. Grundy say?" How queer a reflection: the character who never came on the stage survives, a living thing; the names of author and play are as nearly completely forgotten as modern works of reference will allow anything to be. Mrs. Grundy must have become a popular catchword at once; it has been handed down ever since (as Sir Frederick Banbury once said when attempting to talk a Bill out in his most circumlocutory style) "from father to son; yes, and from mother to daughter." Foreknowledge of such a fate might well have humiliated poor Mr. Morton: to sink into oblivion whilst his most shadowy invention became a household word.

## Books in General

Having commended the *Encyclopædia* for giving me information, for more of which I could easily spare a good deal of the ætiology and thermo-dynamics which makes the work so useful to others, I wondered whether there were any other of these mythical persons who live "where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men," whose origins are unknown by most of those who parrot-like mention them. Such as there are I suspect mostly to have a theatrical origin. "Gay Lothario," which still runs "Don Juan" (whose origin I will no more discuss than that of Faust) very close in the newspapers, is another of the type. He comes out of *The Fair Penitent*, an adaptation of Massinger and Field's *The Fatal Dowry*, by Nicholas Rowe. Rowe has not sunk out of sight like Morton; he was a poet laureate, a friend of Pope and an editor of Shakespeare, and the collected plays of "Mr. N. Rowe" are frequently to be found on the bookstalls. But, though I would not answer for Mr. Gosse, I doubt if any existing man is really familiar with Rowe's plays, and if there is such an one I don't suppose his familiarity is a thing greatly to be envied. All the same, curiosity will drive me to read *The Fair Penitent* next time I encounter it. *Box and Cox* is still acted by amateurs; a time may come when it slips out of memory. But the names and attributes of its two heroes will remain known;

## Mrs. Grundy and Don Juan

for (like the word camouflage) they supply a want that had been felt from the creation of the world until the date of their invention.

"Tommy Atkins" is a person whose origin is not theatrical; he derives from a War Office document and is as fictitious as the legal "Roe" and "Doe." He, perhaps, should not be brought into our present category; being an occupational nickname. But Paul Pry comes in. At least, I do not at the moment recall his parentage. Legendary persons with his proclivities are rather common; they suggest unpleasant thoughts about the demand which must have created such a supply. Peeping Tom (whose "source" everybody knows) is one. There is another, not frequently mentioned in print, but continually to be heard on Cockney lips, with the disagreeable name of "Nosey Parker." Who is, or was, Nosey Parker? What his city and whence his lineage? Conceivably he may have been a figure in some mid-nineteenth century farce, or the hero of a song of the Champagne Charlie period. But popular myth moves in a mysterious way, and he may quite as well have been a seventeenth-century prelate, an eighteenth-century spy, a clergyman, a cobbler, or an officer in the Peninsular War.

## War Humour : Peace Day, 1919

**I**F only nobody had been killed the last few years would have been the most comic in human history. In England particularly. They have been crowded with great events that invite the ironist and little ones that are material for the wag, and they have been, to a large extent, dominated by men who cry for the attentions of the satirist. The knowledge of what has been happening, and all that it has involved, was to some extent an inhibition in the early stages, but as time went on tongues got looser. "We needs must jest a little in the presence of suffering," said Gissing, "else how should we live our lives." And in this week of the organized joy-day—the last funny touch of the whole episode—when the Government had covered London with flags and white pillars eight months after the end of the fighting, and we are all preparing to sing, dance and light bonfires with careful spontaneity and rejoice intently when the official photographer tells us to, three comic histories of the war appear simultaneously.

Mr. Punch's *History of the Great War* (Cassell, 10s. 6d. net) is not unrelievedly funny. It consists of extracts from *Punch*



## War Humour : Peace Day, 1919

throughout the war period, illustrated with selected cartoons and drawings, and provided with "hooks and eyes" by "C. L. G." The entries are grouped under months. Each begins with a sober summary such as "The third year of the War opens well for the Allies ; so well that the Kaiser has again issued a statement denying that he is responsible for it. The Big Push on the Somme goes on steadily, thanks to fine leadership, the steadfast heroism of the New Armies, and the loyal co-operation of the munition workers at home." Interpolated passages of this kind join up the extracts from poems and sketches, and it is not always easy to see where the join comes. The compilation has been ingeniously done, and the most serious pages, such as reports of Parliamentary debates, are freely peppered with paragraphs such as this :—

"The need of a War propaganda at home is illustrated by the answers to correspondents in *The Leeds Mercury*. 'Reasonable questions' are invited, and here is one of the answers : 'T. B.—No, it is not General Sir William Robertson, but the Rev. Sir William Robertson Nicoll who edits *The British Weekly*.' But then, as another journal pathetically observes, 'About nine-tenths of what we say is of no earthly importance to anybody.' Further light is thrown on this confession by the claim

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of an Islington applicant for exemption :  
'Once I was a circus clown, but now I am on  
an evening newspaper.' "

The best things in the text of *Punch* are almost always the extracts from other papers, ingeniously juxtaposed or commented on. A good many little jokes which readers will be glad to meet again are embedded in this history. But it is likely that many will go no farther than the pictures, which are numerous. They are not all funny. *Punch* always considers it necessary to be in some measure the Voice of England, to stand and speak with her enemies in the gate, to commemorate great occasions with dignity. The job of being dignified is largely sustained by Mr. Bernard Partridge, who can draw, but whose drawings of symbolical figures, Peace with an olive branch, London with a civic crown, monarchs defiantly brandishing their swords, monarchs slinking from approaching shadows, workmen with corded trousers and spades talking to employers with silk hats and watch chains, Britannias, La Frances, and Uncle Sams, John Bulls, Lions, and Mr. Punches, leave some of us a little cold. But he and the other *Punch* cartoonists work under difficulties : not only have they to be oracular, but there are all sorts of classes, people and actions, often those offering the best material, that are immune from their satire. The best pictures

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in *Punch* are the small ones, particularly those of Messrs. Morrow and "Bird." The History contains all those which have been most talked about from Mr. Frank Reynolds' *Study of a Prussian Household Having its Morning Hate* to Mr. Raven Hill's *End of a Perfect Tag*—"Germany Expects that Every Man this Day will Do the Dirty."

*Quoth the Raven : An Unofficial History*, by E. V. L. and G. M. (Methuen, 1s. 3d. net), shows what two of the *Punch* battalion can do when they go on the loose. It is slight and consists entirely of news-paragraphs. The first page contains such paragraphs as these :—

"The War Office places large orders for red tape."

"*The Times* points out that if there is to be war we shall need munitions."

"*The Daily Mail*, as 'The Paper That Gets Things Done,' warns the Government that an army will be necessary."

"Mr. Belloc lays down several dozen of the best Blue-Black Ink."

"Birth of Dora."

Amongst later news-items are :—

"Mass meeting of Bishops to agree upon what Bishops ought to say about the teaching of Christ and the war when they are so ill-advised as to say anything."

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"The verb 'to wangle' enters the war."

"First Civilian War Honours List. London henceforth to be known as the City of Dreadful Knights."

"Mr. Bottomley, on expressing his willingness to take holy orders for the duration of the war, appointed Lord Rothermere's private chaplain."

"Increased shortage of English administrators. Sir Ernest Shackleton calls for volunteers for expedition to Scotland to find more Geddeses."

Mr. Morrow's illustrations are delicious parodies of the picture-papers during the war. He draws in so apparently homely a way that I don't think everybody realises how exactly he does what he wants to, and how much observation and knowledge is behind his work. His subsidiary details are always exquisitely right.

The third work is the third and final volume of Mr. Pepys' *Diary of the Great Warr*, published by John Lane. When the first volume appeared I expressed the opinion that, light and topical as was this *Diary*, conceived originally as a weekly column in a paper, it nevertheless had a chance of prolonged life. I still hold that opinion. The people who have lived at home during the war will read it years hence I am certain; it records precisely those



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rumours, intrigues, odd social phenomena that have been most interesting and exciting whilst they lived through them. Whether posterity, which will not understand all the allusions, will read the book is, I know, another matter. But people are always digging up correspondence of this gossip kind from the Napoleonic period, the diary of the Rt. Hon. John Jupp and the Letters of Lady Georgiana Rappee ; and many people find them far better reading than formal histories. The new Pepys "saw it through" not as exceptional thinking people saw it through, but as thousands of substantial and fairly important people saw it through. His comment (with the next sentences) on the Tsar's death is typical : "God rest him ! being a fool, I do believe, more than a rogue, and his wife meddles in his affairs, to his undoing. Which do make of him a lesson to all husbands. Our design was this day to play golph at Tolputt's club, but the foulness of the day do thwart it." The book is a faithful reflection of five years in the West End, and it is one of the most ingenious and faithful prose parodies in existence. Parodying *Pepys* may seem easy, but many people have tried it and I do not remember one before who, for all his painstaking misspellings and references to Sir W. Pen and my lady Castlemaine, has succeeded.

## Ward's *English Poets*

**I**T was in or about 1880 that Vol. IV. of Mr. Humphry Ward's selections from the English Poets was published. In 1894 an Appendix was added, containing selections from Browning, Matthew Arnold and Tennyson. This appendix has now been detached from Volume IV. and placed at the beginning of Volume V., and which covers the ground from Browning to Rupert Brooke. There are over six hundred closely printed pages. They contain short biographies, critical studies, and representative poems of almost all the great or meritorious poets of the period ; and the price charged is what people, in these days of paper famine, have grown accustomed to pay for short and worthless books of memoirs or pseudo-history that perish in six months.

I have never known any man completely satisfied with any anthology ; I am as nearly satisfied with this as I have been with any so large and comprehensive, except Q's first Oxford Book. There are few omissions ; one I will mention later, and another is Wilde, who although not generally of much use as a poet, at least wrote in *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* something which, to put it modestly, equals the best efforts of Lord Lytton and Lord

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Houghton, P. B. Marston and Sir Alfred Lyall. Alexander Smith, Lord de Tabley, and John Davidson (where is *The Runnable Stag*?) are not well treated; but most of the larger people are represented almost perfectly. No room could be found for *The Scholar Gipsy*, but the editor partly atones for the defect by admitting it; and if some works by Tennyson are allowed in that no one making a new selection now would choose, and some omitted that are by general consent among his best, the general level of the selections from him and Browning, Morris, Swinburne and Christina Rossetti is high. I don't know where else so much of the best work of the nineteenth century can be obtained within one cover.

With the reservation, implied above, that we cannot all agree, I should like to say that the selection is weakest where one would expect to it be weakest, namely, at the end. Not the end of the end, for Rupert Brooke, whose sudden fame must have thundered in Mr. Ward's ears just as he was completing the volume, is adequately, though not more than adequately, represented in seventeen pages. But Flecker, who died before Brooke (and of whose nascent greatness Brooke himself was certainly aware), is omitted altogether. This suggests that Mr. Ward and—if I may use the word inoffensively—his cronies were not, three years ago, in touch with the best of

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the younger writers ; though they must have become dimly aware of Flecker by now. Again, several pages are wasted on the scentless roses and tinsel stars of Richard Middleton, nine pages are given to manly legends of Adam Lindsay Gordon, nine to the petrified beauties of John Addington Symonds, and twelve, no fewer than twelve, to Stephen Phillips ; whilst Francis Thompson—who, if he missed the highest rank, was worth all those, and hundreds like them, put together—is fobbed off with a niggardly and scrappily filled eight pages. There is really a serious and indefensible bias against Thompson here ; perhaps Mrs. Ward told Mr. Ward that, if what he said in his introduction about Thompson's opium-smoking was true, it would be most subversive to give him a really good show. The bias in favour of Phillips is less objectionable ; the allocation of so much space to his thin, pleasant music is probably the result of one last kick on the part of Sir Sidney Colvin, who has always had a weak spot for Phillips and reconciles himself, with difficulty, to the way in which his swan is drifting out of sight. But imagine extracts from *Marpessa*, and the iterative rhetoric about the Fireman, crowding out *The Poppy*, *To Viola*, *Her Portrait*, and a dozen others that one might mention. Finally, in the matter of selection, I think that, if it was desirable at all that Mr. C. L. Graves should be given space for a selection from the



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humorous writers, he ought not to have been confined in a space in which though he does his best, he can hardly move. Calverley—who, after all, will be worth more to our posterity than Richard Middleton—might as well have been omitted as presented so ineffectively as he is here, and what is the use of a selection from A. C. Hilton which has no room for *The Heathen Passeur*? W. S. Gilbert is also very badly treated.

The short biographies must have been very difficult things to do. It was no doubt impossible, in the space, to avoid such odd tabloid statements as "His father was an official in the Bank of England, his mother of Scottish and German origin" (Browning); "His grandfather and father were tailors (once prosperous) and his four aunts were among the beauties of the town" (Meredith); and "He was a distinguished bibliophile, numismatist, and botanist, being a leading authority on brambles" (de Tabley). But the critical introductions are, as a rule, exceedingly good. Mr. Woods is excellent on Browning; Arnold, who wrote in 1880 the general introduction to these volumes, is dealt with by the editor, who says with justice: "While of Dryden, of Wordsworth, of Byron, more than half might well be spared, there is scarcely anything in Arnold's volumes—except perhaps *Balder Dead*—that has not a distinct

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value of its own, scarcely anything that ought not to be preserved." Tennyson was done by the late Sir Richard Jebb, whose criticism, though graceful, lacks the last touch of subtlety. The essay on William Barnes is by Mr. Thomas Hardy himself, who writes directly and independently, as one would expect. He defends Barnes's practice of putting compound epithets and recondite sentiments (in dialect) into the mouths of husbandmen with an appeal to those "who differentiate imaginative revelation from the blind transcripts of a reporter's note-book"; and he justly says that behind Barnes's Dorset language "was an academic poet, akin to the school of Gray and Collins." "Barnes, behind his word-screen," he concludes, "had a quality of the great poets, a clear perception or instinct that human emotion is the primary stuff of poetry." Lord Crewe succeeds in the difficult task of writing judiciously about his father, Lord Houghton. Mr. John Bailey, writing of Meredith, says: "He seems to have been totally indifferent to the truth of that generally sound maxim with which Johnson rebuked the critics of Pope's *Homer*, 'The purpose of a writer is to be read.'" Mr. Mackail on Morris and Mr. Percy Lubbock on Christina Rossetti are conspicuous; and Mr. Gosse is as sound here as elsewhere on Swinburne. He writes with his usual delicious choice of epithet and a vivacity, a relish, that one

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wishes he could have communicated to some of his collaborators. "He passed through the years," says Mr. Gosse, "like the fabulous Bird of Paradise, which never perched, because it had no feet."

"To a degree unparalleled, he was cerebral in all his forces. He was an unbodied intelligence 'hidden in the light of thought,' showering a rain of melody from some altitude untouched by the drawbacks and privileges of mortality. Tennyson might have been a farmer, Browning a stockbroker; Rossetti was a painter and Morris an upholsterer; but it is impossible to conceive Swinburne as "taking up" any species of useful employment. To our great good fortune, he was possessed of what are called 'moderate means,' which happily clung to him, by no conscious effort of his own, to the end of his days. He was therefore able to spin out his dream and his music without any species of material disturbance, his only approaches to 'action' being the chimerical controversies, always on æsthetic questions, in which he engaged with mimic fury. These were to him what golf is to other ageing men: they were a form of health-preserving exercise."

If all the essays were up to this level the book would serve as a prose-anthology as well as an anthology of verse.

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### The Papers That There Are

I AM one of those who can never help reading any odd piece of printed paper which comes into their hands accidentally. For instance, odd sheets which shroud parcels sent by booksellers or publishers ; fragments found amid the seaweed, straw, wood, bottles and corks on a beach ; and pieces impaled by my stick when I am out walking. Such a piece of jetsam came my way the other day. I sent to the little shop at the corner for some loose cigarettes. They came back wrapped up in one page of a list sent out to newsagents by Messrs. Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and Co., Ltd. (*anglice* Simpkins'), giving information as to the days on which various periodicals are obtainable. I began reading it, and I read it all through, with ever-increasing wonder.

The list, beginning quite regularly with periodicals obtainable on Monday morning, opened with *Great Thoughts*, truly an inspiring start. I have seen that journal ; I associate it with the *Quiver* and the *Argosy*, which latter, I expect, is dead these many years. The *Light Car and Cycle Car* and several others lead to *Cassell's New 1d. Magazine* (which, most grossly paradoxical, is 2d.), and this is followed by :



## The Papers That There Are

<i>Christian Novels</i>	...	...	1½d.
<i>Chums</i> ...	...	...	1½d.
<i>Comic Cuts</i>	...	...	1½d.

Thirty-two in all are the Monday morning papers. They include *Girls' Mirror*, *Ladies' Companion*, *Lot o' Fun*, *Magnet*, *Picture Fun*, *Smart Novels*, *Competitors' Journal* and *Young Ladies' Journal*. I looked at all these names and meditated on the ignored continents which were opening out before my gaze. What is the *Magnet* and whom does it magnetise; what girls are reflected in that mirror, and to what ladies is that a companion? Who writes for these journals; what masterpieces are buried in them; what is their political influence; is it here that, in unsuspected ways, the real strength of the Coalition is developed and exercised? I had thought myself fairly familiar with the periodical Press, merely because I read Mr. Bottomley weekly, have frequently perused the *Pelican*, *Sporting Life*, the *London Mail* and the *National Review*, and, when going a train journey with children, invariably buy them the *Rainbow*; but the area of my knowledge is nothing to the area of my ignorance.

Tuesday morning, for some occult reason, is a great time for racing prints. The *Expert*, the *Judge*, the *Racing Outlook*, the *Racing World Special* and *Lotinga's Special* all rush

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out neck and neck. With them is the *Banner of Israel*, cheek by jowl with the *Big Comic and Sparks* and the *Butterfly*. The *Family Herald Supplement*, which many men joke about without ever having seen it and without being aware of its continued existence, is another from Tuesday's stable, and it is accompanied by several farming papers—e.g., *Farm and Home*—*Handy Stories*, the *Marvel* (a green production containing, I assure you, highly remarkable school and detective stories), the *Mark Lane Express*, the *Wonder* and (these two come together) the *Times History of the War* and *Siftings*. What are *Siftings*, who are they? I don't know; yet, for all I can say to the contrary, in hundreds of thousands of British homes the day on which *Siftings* appears is the golden day of the week, and far into the night father, in his armchair, reads the tit-bits from it to the family until the flushed children have long overpassed their bedtime.

Tuesday afternoon's list is short and somewhat grim. It runs :

			...	
<i>Boxing</i>	...	...	...	2d.
<i>Bystander</i>	...	...	...	9d.
<i>Casualty List</i>	...	...	...	3d. net.
<i>Punch</i>	...	...	...	6d.
<i>Sketch</i>	...	...	...	1s.
<i>Tatler</i>	...	...	...	1s.

## The Papers That There Are

But there is another big batch on Wednesday morning. *Building News* and *Contract Journal* both, inexplicably, prefer that morning, so does the *Jewish World*, so does a paper which appears, it would seem, on two kinds of paper and is catalogued as :

<i>Life of Faith</i>	...	...	...	2d.
„ „	(thin)	...	...	2d.

the latter edition, presumably, being meant, if not for the backsliders, at least for the weaker brethren. The *Journal of Gaslighting* does not arouse in me the smallest flame, or jet, of curiosity ; but I am slightly piqued by the *Gem* and *Hobbies*. The *National Food Journal*, being a most important institution, follows in large capitals, and then we come to Wednesday afternoon. It is ushered in by :

<i>Gentlewoman</i>	...	...	...	6d.
„	(thin)	...	...	6d.

It appears a low valuation, but *Gentlewoman* (thin) is certainly the acme of meagreness ; far thinner, to all who have any sense of the flavour of words, than *Lady* (thin) would be. The *Mirror of Life* and a few trade journals bring us to that most prolific of periods, Thursday morning. On Thursday morning the adventurous newsagent can procure the *Encore*, the *Meat Trades Journal*, the *Per-*

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former, the *Prim. Methodist Leader* (how apt is that abbreviation!), the *Christian*, the *Cinema*, *Joyful News*, the *Tailor*, the *British Bee Journal*, *Merry and Bright*, the *Morning Star* and *Smart Fiction*. What a list to whet one's appetite! But, alas! it brought me to the end of the sheet. What comes out on Thursday afternoon, not to mention Friday and Saturday, must remain unknown to me, a question as dark as that of the song that the Sirens sang or what dress the hero wore when he lived amongst women. I should, had that other page come, have made doubtless more discoveries, and encountered more old friends whom I had presumed long dead. It may be that Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* is still alive, that the *Anti-Jacobin* still flourishes in some subterraneous way, that the *Rambler* and even *Mercurius Britannicus* may still be purchased, week by week, on Friday, or, perchance, on Saturday. And I might at last have tracked down a paper I have been looking for for years and that I am convinced exists; but I will not yet mention its name.

## Stephen Reynolds

STEPHEN REYNOLDS'S death was a direct result of his devotion to duty. He insisted, when obviously risking illness, on travelling up and down to town



## The Romantic Generation

from Devonshire in the interests of the fishing industry or rather (as he would have protested) of the fishermen; he got pneumonia and died. Others, notably Mr. Cecil Harmsworth, have already done justice to his work as a Government servant and a pioneer of new methods in fishery. In recent years he had subordinated his writing to his official work, and the success he made with *A Poor Man's House*, *The Holy Mountain*, and his reflections of working-class opinion about things in general was not followed up. He was a short, sturdy man who looked stronger than he was: fair, spectacled, bronzed, moustached. He used to come to London in a peaked cap, reefer coat, a jersey and waterside boots, and his concentration on fishermen's interests was so great that if one had lunch with him, it had to be in an all-fish restaurant. He seldom bothered to condemn anybody, but many men must have been warmed by his impulsive and generous congratulations.

## The Romantic Generation

**A**T no time have I felt a burning desire to define the romantic and the classic. After reading Professor F. E. Pierce's *Currents and Eddies in the English Romantic Generation* I am less inclined to do so, or even to use the words when I can avoid them.

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Nevertheless, the English romantic generation, however confused, complicated and self-contradictory, existed ; and if Professor Pierce has not been able to give a comprehensive definition of it he has at least managed to make a picture of it in all its luxuriant diversity. It included Rogers and Campbell, Byron, Scott, Moore, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Lamb, Hazlitt, Peacock and a hundred minor people still remembered in their degrees. They differed in aim, and none has shown more clearly than Professor Pierce the differences between the Cockney Eddy (I do not thank thee for giving me that word), the Holland House Eddy, the Scotch Eddy and the Bristol Eddy, the variety of influences that played upon them, and the variety of exotic or antique colours that they deliberately sought. Between them they ravaged the world for styles and subjects ; and, if it be said that the age (as some maintain) was a hotch-potch), it can only be answered that that is the habit of vigorous epochs in England and that at least this hotch-potch was different from any other. Professor Pierce shows this. Conscious that the colour and scent of an age may often be best seen in minor people, he gives Mrs. Hemans, " L. E. L." and even smaller fry their place. He studies the greater authors in the light of their affinities, demonstrates (and not the most sentimental can upset his conclusions) how

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largely their environment and their inferiors affected them, and groups them with some approximation to scientific exactitude. His analysis of the age (and he studies not only books but popular taste as shown by sales) is the best product I have yet seen of that frequently barren detailed examination of literature which is now being conducted on so wholesale a scale by American professors and candidates for the doctorate.

In the course of his history Professor Pierce says a great many true and interesting things about individuals. He says rightly that Leigh Hunt had a "marvellously correct judgment" of contemporary literature, and that no critic has had fewer of his judgments reversed by posterity. In discussing Coleridge he calls attention to the poet's early nature-poetry, which is almost entirely neglected, poetry Wordsworthian, but often vivid in landscape detail to a degree that Wordsworth did not usually attempt. Most of it was direct reminiscence of the scenes of his childhood: Dykes Campbell, I seem to remember, embodied several long passages in his *Life*. Lamb, says Professor Pierce, might have been a great poet had circumstances been more favourable. He argues convincingly that the Lake School is an unfortunate misnomer; at Bristol there had been far more intercourse and mutual criticism between its chief members

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than there was in the Lakes. He writes very appreciatively of Southey, whose loss, he says, would leave us all poorer, though he describes him as "probably" (why not certainly ?) a man of talent trying to do the work of a man of genius. He is pleasingly transatlantic when he says of Hogg, who began well, that "he did not know when to quit fishing the empty pond," and he is at once discerning and enthusiastic about Sir Walter Scott :

"For a hundred and fifty years no other man forced so many of his contemporaries to read poetry that was at least reasonably poetical. . . . The man was great and the achievement no less so. . . . There is an instinct towards popularity which comes from vanity and greed, and that is destructive to literature. There is another instinct towards popularity which arises from sympathy and a desire for public service. That was the attitude of Scott, and at bottom, while it may not conduce to the most perfect art, it was no ignoble mood and could result in nothing but benefit to mankind."

Here and there one naturally meets something one cannot quite accept. I think Professor Pierce would find Joanna Baillie's poems, as distinguished from her dramas, worth reading ; and I wonder whether he was not hasty in



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saying that "the Hellenism of Shelley would have proved a passing enthusiasm, that of Keats a lasting faith," for Keats when he died was certainly changing and growing. But there are very few amongst his thousands of criticisms that I at least should quarrel with. His faults lie elsewhere. His industry seems to have been exhausted by the collection and survey of facts and the formation of considered opinions; he had no energy left, it would seem, to express himself as well as he could.

The writing of the book is strangely uneven. Much of it is simple and straightforward statement, lit up by an occasional full phrase or witticism. The author is especially fond of waggish misquotation. Addressing Lord Byron, whom he considers to have the attractiveness of the volcano and the panther, he cries: "Did he who made Charles Lamb make thee?" ; this is ingenious and amusing, though not all the other adaptations come off so well. Interspersed with the plain, the witty and the eloquent pages are tracts of the most dismal journalese. When a man writes that "Bristol became the centre of a literary vortex which rejuvenated English poetry and made that erstwhile Philistine region the Mecca of many a literary pilgrim," and adds that it was "the center of the intellectual eddy, but by no means the dom-

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inant element in the atmosphere," experience suggests that he will never make a sentence that one will think good and never deliver a judgment that one will consider acute and original. But Professor Pierce oscillates between the dullest sham-picturesque English and English pointed and terse; following immediately on the sentences quoted one comes across phrases like that in which he refers to Cottle's abandonment of his publishing business: "he gave up the selling of poetry for the uninterrupted composition of it, thereby inflicting a double wound on the Muses," which shows a vivacity one had thought incompatible with the wholesale mixture of stock metaphor. Wit is not perhaps an essential part of good criticism, but it is seldom one meets good criticism couched in thoroughly second-rate English as one does here. Had any other writer so run to death these "eddies" and "tangents" and "circles" as he does, he would have been one of the first to laugh at him. I suppose stylistic lifelessness is a peril that constantly threatens anyone who compiles books on the scientific system that I think Professor Pierce must have been compelled to use. I cannot conceive that this book has been made save with the help of many reference-hunting and classifying assistants, charts, diagrams, literary maps and card-indexes. If those have been the means, however, the result thoroughly justifies their

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employment. For all his attempt at discovering what, by the collection and sorting of miscellaneous "literary facts," may be discovered, Professor Pierce never loses sight of the limitations of the method, never becomes a materialist in his attitude, is always aware of the supreme importance of personality and the intangible reality of inspiration. His authors, however grouped, remain men with hearts, temperaments, loves, hates and dreams, not merely the slaves of literary influences or the media of tendencies. It is a long time since I have read a work of literary history which was at once so sensible, so fruitful of interesting conclusions, and so crowded with amusing quotations and fragments of information from the most diverse sources.

## Edward Thomas

WHEN Edward Thomas was killed his first book of poems was in the press. There remained over an equal number of verses, which have now been collected in a volume, *Last Poems*. There is nothing surprising in the book. Every poem has its kindred amongst those already printed. The spirit of the man is the spirit already familiar : a spirit melancholy but not morbid, conscious of the impermanence of life, but

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keenly enjoying every transient beauty of the world, and consoled for every winter by the renewal of every spring. There are no "songs of action"; wars and houses, men and flowers are all contemplated quietly, *sub specie aeternitatis*; the metres flag and droop; the hues are sober and the sounds subdued. Yet, though a poet very uniform in tone and equable in temperament, Thomas had a genius for observation that always gave variety to his writing: he was always looking at things, and never twice at exactly the same thing. No man of his time knew and loved the South of England better than he. And the things he loved were the things commonest in life and most unusual in literature: waggons coming down a lane, raindrops on dust, nettles in a farmyard corner, ordinary hedges and ordinary fields. He never sought for the spectacular; any English landscape under any sky of spring or autumn was enough for him. He knew all our trees, flowers and birds: the sedge-warbler as well as the thrush, agrimony and dog's mercury as well as daffodil and hyacinth. And all awoke emotion in him, with the result that even the slightest and the most limping of his poems—and some of them move very awkwardly indeed—have an odour about them that is peculiar and a truth that never fails to interest. On any page you come across a picture like this, imbued with unforced feeling as this is:



## Edward Thomas

*The thrush on the oak top in the lane  
Sang his last song, or last but one ;  
And as he ended, on the elm  
Another had but just begun  
His last ; they knew no more than I  
The day was done.*

*Then past his dark white cottage front  
A labourer went along, his tread  
Slow, half with weariness, half with ease ;  
And, through the silence, from his shed  
The sound of sawing rounded all  
That silence said.*

Or again, *But These Things Also :*

*But these things also are Spring's—  
On banks by the roadside the grass  
Long-dead that is greyer now  
Than all the Winter it was ;*

*The shell of a little snail bleached  
In the grass ; a chip of flint, and mite  
Of chalk ; and the small birds' dung  
In splashes of purest white :*

*All the white things a man mistakes  
For earliest violets  
Who seeks through Winter's ruins  
Something to pay Winter's debts,  
While the North blows, and starling flocks  
By chattering on and on  
Keep their spirits up in the mist,  
And Spring's here, Winter's not gone.*

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I can conceive a man's objecting that some lines here are ungainly and unmusical ; but the man is blind who will miss the direct observation, and dense who will miss the subtlety and tenderness of the feeling. In *Aspens*, one of the four or five best things here, even the technical objection cannot be urged :

*All day and night, save Winter, every weather,  
Above the inn, the smithy, and the shop,  
The aspens at the cross-roads talk together  
Of rain, until their last leaves fall from the top.*

*Out of the blacksmith's cavern comes the ringing  
Of hammer, shoe and anvil ; out of the inn  
The clink, the hum, the roar, the random singing—  
The sounds that for these fifty years have been.*

*The whisper of the aspens is not drowned,  
And over lightless pane and footless road,  
Empty as sky, with every other sound  
Not ceasing, calls their ghosts from their abode,*

*A silent smithy, a silent inn, nor fails  
In the bare moonlight or the thick-furred gloom,  
In tempest or the night of nightingales,  
To turn the cross-roads to a ghostly room.*

*And it would be the same were no house near.  
Over all sorts of weather, men, and times,  
Aspens must shake their leaves and men may hear  
But need not listen, more than to my rhymes.*

## Edward Thomas

*Whatever wind blows, while they and I have  
leaves*

*We cannot other than an aspen be,  
That ceaselessly, unreasonably grieves,  
Or so men think who like a different tree.*

The last line is characteristic. There are men who like a different tree, and like it so exclusively that they refuse to appreciate the aspen. There are also people so meticulous in their demands for perfection of phrasing or music that they allow carelessness such as Thomas was habitually guilty of to obscure the frequent music of his verse and its invariable fullness of content. In urging those who do not yet know his work to buy this book and the other, I would recommend them, before reading, to clear their mind of all prepossessions, not to think, "How would Shelley or Shakespeare have written this?" not to be on the watch for flaws and cacophonies; but at least at the first reading, to surrender themselves, to come to him receptive for what he can give. I don't think they will be disappointed: he had gifts not exactly to be paralleled elsewhere, and a personality unlike any other in our literature.

That personality has already been sufficiently described in these pages. It was not one the memory of which dims with the passage of time. No man who knew Edward Thomas

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will fail to retain to the end of his days the vivid image of that tall, contemplative man, so undemonstrative yet, in his manner, so impressive. His character is written in his verses. He was an unworldly man, and little was necessary to his content. He summarised his wishes in *For These*, not one of the best of his poems, but sincere :

*An acre of land between the shore and the hills,  
Upon a ledge that shows my kingdoms three,  
The lovely visible earth and sky and sea,  
Where what the curlew needs not, the farmer tills.*

*A house that shall love me as I love it,  
Well-hedged and honoured by a few ash-trees  
That linnets, greenfinches and goldfinches  
Shall often visit and make love in and flit :*

*A garden I need never go beyond  
Broken but neat, whose sunflowers every one  
Are fit to be the sign of the Rising Sun :  
A spring, a brook's bend, or at least a pond :*

*For these I ask not, but, neither too late  
Nor yet too early, for what men call content,  
And also that something may be sent  
To be contented with, I ask of fate.*

Fate robbed him. He enlisted, went to France, and died. But in his last year of life, almost unconsciously, he registered what one

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may frigidly call his "conclusions" about English landscape and his own feeling for it, and registered them immortally. Until the war he was a sensitive, but largely a frustrate, student of Nature who wrote prose which just failed of a wide, and might have just failed of a permanent, appeal. But he broke into verse, and his verse will carry his prose and the memory of himself down the centuries. It may not be the greatest poetry. But it is exact in expression and true and sweet in feeling: it is as English as anything that exists, and there are preserved in it a thousand English sights and sounds which have perfumed the souls of men, but which have never entered literature before.

## The Lost Classics (1916)

THE other evening, I heard a man remark that he hoped that a few dons had been sent with the fleet to the Dardanelles in view of the possibility of rescuing ancient manuscripts from the city, if and when it was attacked. It is improbable that the Admiral has any academic A.D.C.'s attached to his staff for Special Service. But it is quite possible that there are a few dons in the Dardanelles contingent of the Naval Brigade ("Churchill's Army"),

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in which the company (in no detrimental sense) is understood to be very mixed. If so, and if an occupation of Stamboul does give them opportunities of exploration, they may find something. For romantic rumours have always been afloat as to piles of "lost classics" stowed away in crypts and lofts and mosque libraries, jealously guarded from the Giaour eye like the Secrets of the Harem. There may be nothing in it. The eloping Byzantines who came to Italy with bags full of texts in the fifteenth century may have brought away everything that was worth bringing. Ecclesiastical vandalism was not a peculiarly Western product, and a race of monks who expurgated the Anthology according to their own canons not merely of morality, but also of taste, may have destroyed by the time of Constantine XII. much that existed in the time of Constantine I. It is, however, worth remembering—what we frequently forget—that a really considerable portion not merely of the minor, but also of the major classics is still "lost." We may have Homer, Virgil, and Plato virtually in bulk, and quite enough Euripides to keep Professor Murray busy; but an enormous amount of literature, famous in its day, has disappeared.

The greater part of the Greek drama and poetry has gone. Possibly the pre-Homeric songs and hymns were not known even to

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the Greeks of classical times; and unless, which is doubtful, the "exponents" of "oral tradition" were in the habit of taking and burying gramophone records they are beyond recall. But the epic-writers who, in Mr. Kipling's elegant phrase, smote the bloomin' lyre after Omer, have also gone. We have some names. There was the *Little Iliad*, the *Nostoi* of Agias, and Arctinus' *Sack of Troy*; and there were epics by Strasinus and Eugammon of Cyrene. Hesiod alone remains of the Bœotian epic-writers, and we may be forgiven a sentimental regret for the loss of the works of Epimenides, the Cretan Rip van Winkle and Old Parr, who went to sleep for half a century and lived altogether for nearly three hundred years, being very deservedly deified for his feats. Only scraps remain of Callinus (who is said to have invented elegiacs), of Tyrtæus (*le Begbie de ses jours*), and of the great lyrist Alcman. The reputation of Archilochus of Paros, who flourished in the seventh century before Christ, was still very great in the days of the Roman Empire; Longinus (or whoever wrote the *Treatise on the Sublime*) had a very high opinion of him, and Horace and others speak of the poisonous power of his satire, which is alleged to have driven his successful rival in love to suicide. He passed this valuable gift on to his celebrated disciple Hipponax of Ephesus; in this case the victims were sculptors who had made too

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faithful an image of the bard. The immoral moral poems of Theognis are gone like the songs of Arion, that maritime Orpheus. Anacreon and Sappho, famous as they are, we have to take almost entirely on trust from the ancients. What has been found of Sappho's does not shake her reputation as one of the greatest lyric poets in the world's history. The works of her alleged suitor Alcæus have disappeared; Stesichorus and "pure Simonides" are in little better case. What we have of Pindar is only a torso, if a sublime one. Leonidas of Tarentum, the contemporary and fellow-countryman of Theocritus, we know only from a few exquisite things in the Anthology. Almost the whole of the later lyric poetry has vanished. Philetas of Cos was reputed a prince of erotics. The fame of young Archias spread over the whole Western world while he was still in his 'teens. Then there were Lycophron and Callimachus, whose vast "output" is now represented by a small residuum. He was both an Alexandrine and a librarian; but he came near perfection at times, as in the well-known lament for Heracitus, so perfectly translated by the late William Cory. Meleager, whose own epigrams, delicate and poignant, are amongst the brightest flowers in the Anthology, made a collection of the best short poems of his own time and the ages before him. We have not even that, but only an expurgation of an expurgation



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of it, with much of the original good verse omitted, and a considerable amount of Byzantine work added which can neither please the taste nor edify the mind.

It is impossible here to go in detail into all the departments of literature, but the losses are everywhere great. Our history of the Greek theatre is built on hearsay. Aristotle knew, and considered as the root whence Greek comedy sprang, a poem called *Margites*, which was fathered on Homer, who had a back of Baconian breadth. A few lines survive. The first distinguished figure of the great Attic tragedy was Phrynichus, who was heavily fined for unmaning his audience by the devastating terror of his *Sack of Miletus*. His tragedies are lost. Of all the tragedies of Æschylus but a tenth or a twelfth survive; of Sophocles a still smaller proportion; and even of Euripides only a third is extant. Of the other tragedians, Ion at least, whom Aristophanes and others praised highly, would be worth recovering. We have no plays by Susarion, who perhaps founded the old comedy, or by the very popular Cratinus and Eupolis; and of Aristophanes we are only acquainted with a fifth. The comic playwrights of the decadence, the pre-Socratic philosophers, the early prose-writers, the orators, the historians have all in great part perished. What, in reality, were the prose and verse of Empedocles

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like ? Theopompus, the sardonic historian, was mentioned in the same breath as Herodotus and Thucydides. Many other historians of great repute in all periods have disappeared ; and those we do possess we possess only in fragments. Some of the most valuable of Plutarch's Lives have vanished. The greatest loss from the political scientist's point of view is undoubtedly that of the vast and exhaustive account of various constitutions drawn up by Aristotle and his pupils. They are said to have collected and arranged particulars of no fewer than a hundred and fifty of such constitutions, the *Polity of Athens* being but one from this vast array. "He made," as Sir Frederick Pollock has said, "a full and minute study of the existing constitutions of the Greek cities, and thus collected a great body of information and materials, unhappily lost to us for the most part. And we regret the loss all the more keenly in that we know how accurate Aristotle was." Lastly, there are the romances, books of travels, and pseudo-scientific works. The Milesian tales were collected and written down in Greek and translated into Latin. We have them in neither tongue, nor the similar short stories emanating from Ephesus, Cyprus, and elsewhere. The familiar *Widow of Ephesus* is probably a specimen. This tale has been told under many skies. Pornographic tales are things that the race does not "willingly let die,"

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and from what we know of the epidemic nature and persistence of this kind of story it seems likely that, what with the mediæval French and Italian collections, not to speak of the Arabian and Chinese tales, we are familiar with more of the Milesian *contes* than we are aware of. The origins of the Greek novel cannot now be traced owing to the loss of early fictions. Judging by the quality of the novels (mostly about love and pirates) that have been transmitted, we have not suffered greatly by the disappearance of so many of the later romances ; but some of the collections of prodigies and wonders must have been entertaining.

With the Latins losses are not so numerous, nor could they be so important. Of Lucillus the satirist, the friend of Scipio and the admired of Horace, there remain but a few lines. Another early lost poet is that P. Lucinius Tegula, who was considered one of the first of comic writers. He flourished about 200 B.C. ; and Livy stirs our imaginations when he relates how during the Macedonian War the Decemvirs ordered a hymn by Tegula to be sung all over Rome by thrice nine virgins. The immediate reason was that everybody had been alarmed by the birth of a pig with a human head, a lamb with a pig's head, a five-footed calf, and several hermaphrodites : certainly an unusual crop. The

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greatest writers of the great Roman Age survive bodily, but half Ovid's not very delightful but extremely informative *Fasti* have gone, and Tibullus is very incomplete; whilst there are many poets, highly praised by Horace, Propertius, and others, who survive only in fragments or not at all. Amongst these are Mark Antony's prolific son Julius; Titius Septimus; Plotius, and Tucca, who were given by Augustus the ticklish job of editing and "cutting" Virgil after he was dead; Varius, whom Virgil commended to Mæcenas; and above all perhaps C. Calvus Licinius, who died before he was thirty, one of the most famous men of his time.

Of Latin drama we possess only a skeleton: a long list of "missing" could be given, but Ennius, Nævius, and Accius will suffice. In historical literature there are chasms everywhere. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that, were but the most familiar of them filled up, our knowledge of Roman history would be doubled, and our knowledge of the outlying countries very much increased. What we have of Livy is only a quarter of what Livy wrote. Several books of Tacitus—probably amongst the most engrossing—are missing; so also, in varying degrees, the works of Cornelius Nepos, Sallust, old Cato, Suetonius, Velleius Paterculus, Mucianus, Varro—to mention only the most familiar names. And so



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on to the end of the catalogue. Much of the miscellaneous work of the Empire has perished, and a tear may at least be shed over the absent portions of Petronius.

There may be nothing to be found in Constantinople. The legend may also be baseless that unique manuscripts are possessed by the monks of Mount Athos, who so pleased Gibbon by their mystical habit of staring at their navels and seeing a great light. But much of value may yet be recovered elsewhere. After several barren centuries excavations, principally in Egypt, have in the last twenty or thirty years recovered a good deal. The *Polity of Athens* (attributed to Aristotle) and the Bibliothèque National speech of Hyperides have come to light. The poems of Bacchylides made a "sensation" in 1897. M. Lefebvre's fragments of Menander (thirteen hundred lines) were quite enough to weaken the dramatist's reputation in 1905; and since then there have been beautiful fragments of Sappho and a satyric drama by Sophocles, an example of an art-form of which the *Cyclops* of Euripides was the only specimen we previously knew. All this while Drs. Grenfell and Hunt, and other archæologists, have been disinterring vast masses of records of small literary merit, but of immense value for the light they shed upon social and economic organisation and customs. But enormous

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scope for discovery remains, even outside Egypt. As in Egypt anything of classical Greece may lie, so in another place "lost" Greek and Latin books of the best periods may be hidden in abundance. "All that is necessary," said a writer in the *Classical Review* a few years ago, "in order to bring about discoveries greater than those of Poggio is for the Italian Government to refrain from building an ironclad, and with the money thus saved to dig up Herculaneum, where countless papyri may still be preserved by the friendly mud which enveloped the town before it was overwhelmed by the torrents of lava on which the squalid suburb of Resina now rests." What digging has been done at Herculaneum in the past has produced many fine bronzes, marbles, and paintings, but the particular Roman whose library has been unearthed had an unfortunate and unaccountable penchant for the works of Philodemus of Gadara, a boring philosopher who would not have left the world much the poorer had he run down a steep place into the sea, like so many of his fellow-citizens. But Vesuvius may have preserved much that man has destroyed. Even a Chestertonian Optimist could scarcely hope to recover from Herculaneum works written after Herculaneum was buried. Yet almost anything of the great Greek and Latin eras may be there, and the Italian Government can scarcely be congratulated on refusing

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(from parsimony) to do the digging itself and (from jealousy) to allow foreigners to undertake it. The expense would no doubt be considerable, owing to the depth and hardness of the deposits. But a few hundred thousand pounds would probably be enough; and, at worst, an auction of the "finds" would certainly recoup the Government. In the last resort one might have thought that there would have been enough wealthy persons in the world interested in archæological discovery to put up the money even if the Italian Government does insist—as it insisted when Professor Waldstein formulated his scheme—on keeping the "loot." But possibly not just at present.

## A Frenchman in England

LATE in the war there appeared in Paris a book called *Les Silences du Colonel Bramble*, by André Maurois. It described an English mess in Flanders from the point of view of a French interpreter, attached. It was noticed in a few English papers, including this one. All who saw it recognised its peculiar qualities as an acute if slight interpretation of England to France, and there was a general demand that it should be translated. The translation, or the production, has taken rather a long time;

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but at last the English version has appeared under the title of *The Silence of Colonel Bramble*. It is worth further commendation.

I do not know who M. Maurois is. Both his prose and his verse testify to considerable practice in the art of writing; there is conclusive evidence that he was himself an interpreter with the British forces; and he knows Englishmen and England more intimately, and feels with them more sympathetically, than any Frenchman who has recently written. His mess is the mess of the Lennox, a Scotch regiment. His principal characters are Colonel Bramble, Major Parker, Dr. O'Grady, the Scotch padre, and Aurelle, the Frenchman. The doctor, an Irishman, talks and argues; the major, an educated man who affects Philistinism, puts the sound conservative case; Aurelle reasons mildly in a liberal way; the padre tells tall stories; the colonel thinks that arguments are tedious, circulates the bottle, and plays tunes on his gramophone, the records of which he preserves with tender solicitude. None of the arguments are conducted very seriously by the arguers or the author, but you get at the thoughts under the words just as you get at the emotions under the silences and the cynical chaff. And the colonel—though a Scot—is represented as the most thoroughly English of the lot. There is a warm argument about political

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institutions. The Irish doctor is alone, of the British, provided with an explanation and a defence of the British system. "The English people," he says :

"who have already given the world Stilton cheese and comfortable chairs, have invented for our benefit the Parliamentary system. Our M.P.'s arrange rebellions and *coups d'état* for us, which leaves the rest of the nation time to play cricket. The Press completes the system by enabling us to take our share in these tumults by proxy. All these things form a part of modern comfort, and in a hundred years' time every man—white, yellow, red or black—will refuse to inhabit a room without hot water laid on, or a country without a Parliament."

Aurette defends Parliaments, and says that England owes a great deal to the French Revolution. In this the colonel sees one element only, and an admirable one :

"'Bravo, messiou,' said the colonel, 'stick up for your country. One ought always to stick up for one's country. Now, please pass the port. I am going to play you The Mikado.'"

He has few and simple tastes. He cares only for "familiar scenes and fine old crusted jokes." There was an extract from a letter

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that some benighted chaplain had written to the *Times*. "The life of the soldier," wrote this excellent man, "is one of great hardship, not infrequently mingled with moments of real danger":

"The colonel thoroughly enjoys the unconscious humour of this remark, and would quote it whenever a shell scattered gravel over him. But his great resource, if the conversation bores him, is to attack the padre on his two weak points; bishops and Scotchmen."

Another laconic is a visiting major, whose normal attitude may be illustrated with this:

" 'And you,' he added, politely, after a short silence, 'what do you do in peace time?'"

" 'I write a little,' said Aurelle, 'and I am trying for a degree.'"

" 'No, no; I mean what is your sport?'"

Almost every man in the book observes that it is strange that no Frenchman knows how to make tea; almost every man has sporting anecdotes; and virtually all say that they intend to go to New Zealand, or Barbadoes, or East Africa after the war. "Aurelle, rather dazed, fuddled with the Indian sun and the scent of wild animals, at last realised that this world is a great park laid out by a gardener god for the gentlemen of the United

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Kingdom." I would not, however, give the impression that there is nothing in the book but disjointed conversations. There are some long stories—the beautiful best being that about the Army goats and the padre's account of how he killed sixteen lions—and some very vivid little sketches of warfare. The whole is of a piece, charmingly harmonious in tone and closely woven together.

The author's conclusions about us are briefly summarised. He could no doubt write an elaborate treatise on the English character as it appears to a foreigner, but he prefers to indicate his line of thought in a few short sentences :

"Amid the horrible wickedness of the species, the English have established an oasis of courtesy and phlegm. I love them.

"I must add that it is a very foolish error to imagine that they are less intelligent than ourselves, in spite of the delight my friend Major Parker pretends to take in affirming the contrary."

We could wish for no higher compliment. M. Maurois knows when we do not mean what we say, what we do mean and don't say, and how frequently we will pose merely in order to protest against somebody else's obnoxious attitude.

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The book has a perfect ending. Aurelle, shortly after the padre's death, has left the regiment for another ; the colonel has become a general ; the major has gone on the colonel's staff. One day Aurelle goes up to Bramble's headquarters ; the three with Doctor O'Grady have a meal, "just as in the old days"—for even in the war there were "old days"—and visit the padre's grave. Returning, they tell the chauffeur to drive through Cr cy. They recreate in imagination the old war and the old battle. The major looks for the tower from which King Edward had watched the fight.

" 'I thought,' he said, 'that it had been made into a mill, but I don't see one on the horizon.'

" Aurelle, noticing a few old peasants, helped by children, cutting corn in the next field, went up to them and asked them where the tower was.

" 'The tower ? There is no tower in these parts,' one of them said, 'nor mill either.'

" 'Perhaps we are wrong,' said the major. 'Ask him if this is really where the battle was.'

" 'The battle !' replied the old man. 'What battle ?'

" And the people of Cr cy turned back to their work, binding into neat sheaves the corn of this invincible land."



## A Terrifying Collection

Few living writers achieve so great a range of sentiment with so uniformly light and unassuming a manner.

## A Terrifying Collection

“**P**EACE on earth and goodwill towards men.” “Peace on earth to men of goodwill.” Take your choice of the renderings; they are both unexceptionable. But peace brings new problems.

An offer has been made to the Birmingham Reference Library, by “a donor who wishes to remain anonymous,” of the money necessary to pay for the gathering of a complete collection of the war poetry issued in the British Empire. I take this information from a letter written to the *Times* by the Chief Librarian of the City of Birmingham Public Libraries. The gentleman goes on to say: “A considerable amount of such material must have been issued in the provincial towns and cities, and would not be necessarily recorded in the ordinary literary and trade publications. These small and out-of-the-way publications, many of which are mere pamphlets, are likely to escape attention. . . . As it is not likely that many other libraries will form a war poetry collection, the Birmingham collection

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should, in due course, be of considerable national importance."

The optimist! It will not be of great national importance, but it will certainly be of great interest to that small and fastidious class of connoisseurs who have a proclivity for the worst work that proceeds from human pens. There have been, I freely and thankfully admit, a good many admirable poems inspired by the war. Julian Grenfell's poem, *Before Action*, will be immortal, humanly speaking; that is to say, it will be read until the next Ice Age supervenes, assuming that the English language lasts until the next Ice Age. It is a masterpiece; a magnificent and original poem; a poem which is in itself sufficient to prove that had the author (and he was thinking of abandoning the Army for literature when the war broke out) adopted literature as a profession, he would have cut a very great figure. Rupert Brooke's war sonnets are now known throughout the English-speaking world. So, in their degrees, are Flecker's poem on the Marne and various poems of Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Nichols, Maurice Baring, Robert Graves, and a dozen lesser writers who, under the influence of the war and its calamities, have "come off." But most of these men and their works are well known. They are familiar: Birmingham will not have a monopoly in them. What

## A Terrifying Collection

Birmingham promises, or threatens, to possess is the greatest collection of infamously bad verse that the world has ever seen.

Think what it means. This discreet "donor," who wisely prefers to remain anonymous, has commissioned the mandarins of the Birmingham Library to acquire, catalogue and exhibit all the metrical comments that have been written on the war in books or in the columns of the periodical Press. Has that donor, have those grateful librarians, ever kept a close watch on contemporary books or on the provincial Press? If they have not, they cannot imagine what they are letting themselves in for; if they have, their blood must be on their own heads, and they deserve the surprise they will get.

Probably, during the war, some 15,000 poems have been written about the German aggression. If you could shake all the 15,000 poems up in a bag and get out an average representative specimen, it would run something like this:

*The crafty Hun, he plotted our downfall  
And unawares invaded Belgium (3 syllables)  
But Joffre he sent them all, or nearly all,  
To seek their due reward in Kingdom Come.*

That will do for the 1914 efforts. The poems

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of 1915 and 1916 may adequately be represented by :

*Ha ! Kaiser ! Thought'st thou, insolent to boast,  
That these thy legions, clad in German steel,  
Would break the line and reach the Flanders  
coast,  
And make Britannia thy prowess feel ?*

And those of 1918, especially the end of 1918, might be typified in lines such as :

*The long, long wait is over,  
The Hun recoils at last :  
He will not now recover,  
His reign is overpast,  
The Crown Prince and the Kaiser  
Are safe on Holland soil,  
Sadder, if not wiser,  
And tired of all their toil.*

These extracts may seem imbecile. They are. Had I sat up all night every night for a week, taking hachisch, veronal, opium, ether, amyl, and all the other drugs ; had I, moreover, been determined to be as silly as I could be and excise anything sensible, reasonable, eloquent or musical, I could not have composed anything more utterly fatuous, banal and uninteresting than the ordinary war-poem which has appeared in the ordinary London newspaper. As for the provincial

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newspapers, "God bless us every one," as Tiny Tim said. They have reached depths deeper than ever plummet sounded.

I hope, therefore, that the Birmingham collection will really be complete. If that donor really means business I shall be prepared to supply him with one or two rare and special examples myself. I possess tributes to the English effort written by Portuguese, Japanese and Belgians; and pæans by Englishmen which excel, as regards both simplicity of sentiment and illiteracy of construction, any foreign composition. Birmingham is not noted for very many things. It is, we know, the only large city in the country which remains solidly Tory in election after election. It produced, we know, Mr. Joseph and Mr. Austen Chamberlain. It has, we know, something like a monopoly in the manufacture of the gods in wood and brass to which (in his blindness) the heathen bows down; and there are all sorts of cheap lines in which it can give the whole world points and a beating. But it has not yet got the conspicuous position of Manchester or Liverpool; and one feels that the enterprise of this anonymous donor may help to put it on a level with those towns. For, granted that its librarians take their commission seriously, and its friends give them the utmost assistance in their power, there seems every

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reason to suppose that within the next year the City of Birmingham will be the proud possessor of the largest mound of villainously bad literature in the English-speaking world. Pilgrims will go to see it who on no other account would have gone to Birmingham; historians will refer to it when endeavouring to prove that their own ages are superior to ours in intelligence; authors will inspect it when seeking the consoling assurance that far, far worse things than they have ever done have got into public libraries and been seriously catalogued. The enterprise, in fact, is likely to be of service to several classes of our fellow-citizens; and it cannot, as far as I am able to see, do harm to any. It should therefore be encouraged, and I recommend anyone who has volumes of war-verse which he wishes to get rid of to send them off at once to the Chief Librarian of Birmingham.

## Prohibition and the Poet

SOME years ago I wrote—it is pathetic to think that nobody but I will now remember it—about the reflection in literature of the public attitude toward drink. I pointed out, or at least argued, that the old natural way of celebrating the virtues and graces of wine and beer had disappeared,

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and that in this age, when many people think badly of you if they see you going into an inn, the authors of drinking songs write self-consciously and often sullenly, with defiance for the watching Puritans who think that drink is poison, and contempt for the bloodless persons who fill themselves with barley-water. Mr. Belloc and Mr. Chesterton, when they sing of beer, are thinking not so much of beer as of the enemies of beer; they utter not a contented hymn of praise but a challenge. They denounce "beverages" as heretical; they pillory the dyspeptic millionaire who commits all the heinous sins but drinks lemonade; they ask whether the grocer has ever been known to "crack a bottle of fish sauce or stand a man a cheese," and they paint gloomily a world fast being overshadowed by the Moslem doctrine. We have gone farther than that now, farther than any place our ancestors dreamed of. Coleridge called Swift "*anima Rabelaisii habitans in sicco*," the soul of Rabelais dwelling in a dry place; but the America of to-morrow would be a drier place for the soul of Rabelais than the body of any Swift. Canada also is "involved." From Baffin's Bay to the Rio Grande there will be (since we are mentioning Coleridge) "water, water, everywhere, nor any drop to drink." A year hence some ululating bard in a New York garret may be writing a farewell ode to the Last Cocktail.

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Let others, the sociologists and the doctors, dispute about the general effects of alcohol. Personally I trust that they will differ, for when doctors disagree honest men come by their own. But the effects of drink upon efficiency and the kidneys, production and the peritoneum are not for me to discuss; I can only concern myself with the "evidential value" to be derived from literature. I am not thinking of the fact that a great deal of good literature has been produced—it is unscientific to blink the fact—under the influence of alcohol as under the influence of other drinks and drugs. Byron wrote some of his best work on gin and water, Coleridge on opium, and a modern of my acquaintance on strong cold tea, which he finds (taken seldom) clarifies his mind, excites his imagination and doubles his energy. Those are facts; but the worst poison in the world might stimulate a man for a time, and facts on both sides have to be taken into account. Nor am I contending that so much good work has been done by drinkers and about drink that drink is demonstrably good. What I am thinking about is the internal evidence that alcoholic literature affords as to the defects and merits of drink and the qualities of various sorts of drink.

Let us take the second question first: I don't know why, but it is the custom if

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you wish to appear a really serious arguer, like the men who write for the monthly reviews. He who surveys the literature of drink will find, I think, that certain drinks are glorified as boons to mankind, and that certain others are strangely ignored. Wine has been panegyrised in all climes and ages that have known it; the same can be said of beer. Brandy and rum come a long way after; but they do appeal to writers of the more vociferous and piratical kind of literature. Whisky, however, and gin have never (outside the facetious writers of music-hall songs) had their celebrant. You cannot imagine a man beginning with "Plumpy Bacchus with pink eyne," and (quite apart from the exigencies of rhyme) going on to belaud the jovial qualities of whisky; or a version of the old chorus which should run:

*Back and side go bare, go bare,  
Both feet and hands go cold;  
But, belly, God send thee good gin enough—  
Whether it be new or old.*

It may be that in Gaelic, for they have had this native liquor long in the Celtic countries, there is a song in praise of whisky, but in English (though a large majority of our modern writers have probably drunk it daily) no praise of whisky, beyond the advertisement columns, exists. Whisky-drinking may

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or may not be a vice ; but we may deduce from our literature that it is no better than a habit ; nobody has apotheosised the drink, and popular myth has not produced the spirituous equivalent of Dionysus or John Barleycorn. We may therefore, as students of literature, offer confirmation for the view that there is a distinction between spirits and other alcoholic drinks, and that that distinction has been instinctively made by generations of men who never knew that they were making it.

And on the other point I think that, whether or not the outcome of the American enterprise will be a Teetotal World, and whether or not it ought to be a Teetotal World, those are at least wrong who contend—as most prohibition enthusiasts do—that “ alcohol ” is on precisely the same plane as noxious drugs. If this were so we should certainly find that, other things being equal, drinkers who have written about their drinking would have assumed the same attitude as druggers who have written about their drugging. But they never have. De Quincey wrote a panegyric of opium, but what he panegyricised he confessed to have been a subtle and delusive witch from whose snares he had with long and agonising effort torn himself ; Baudelaire and his circle sang of haschisch, but only as the mother of illusions which hid a too horrible world and

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## Prohibition and the Poet

wore away a too tedious life. Inebriates exist ; but the vast majority of drinkers are and have been moderate drinkers ; and whatever the analysts and the timers of motions and reactions may say, it is indisputable that you may have to look a long way for confessions on these authors' parts that their potations have been mentally or physically bad for them. As a fact, the writers of drinking songs do not talk about the fascinating snares of beer or the ruinous charms of wine ; they treat them, almost invariably, as natural things, amongst God's most welcome gifts to man. And as a fact the "victims" of drugs never dream of saluting their drugs with addresses like :

*Opium, opium, glorious opium,  
What should we do without opium ?*

Or :

*Come, chemist, fill the silver box  
With morphia or with ether.*

People may get excited, but they do not get genially rollicking, on veronal, haschisch and heroin ; and they certainly do not sit down and write jolly songs about them on the morning after. We may, therefore, take the evidence of literature, as far as it goes, as justification for a request to ardent prohibition advocates to—if they will pardon so profane a metaphor, and so split an infinitive—draw it mild.

## Mr. Kipling's Later Verse

REVIEWERS have freely remarked that Mr. Kipling's latest volume of verse (*The Years Between*) is the first he has published for sixteen years. The statement is misleading; a very few years ago the volume *Songs from Books* appeared. It is true that many things in that volume were old when reprinted; but others were newer than some of the verse in *The Years Between*. Those, therefore, who take the latest work as a proof that the post 1903 Kipling has been incapable of writing anything equal to his old best are forgetful of things like the Smuggler's Song and the song about the mill that was in the *Doomsday Book*. That he does his best very seldom now, is, however, true; and when he makes a whole book out of nothing but his political and war verses he shows himself at his worst. I do not see how anyone could possibly commend *The Years Between*, save a man who thoroughly shared Mr. Kipling's sentiments: there is nothing in it to admire except the opinions, and that is not enough to keep verse alive.

It is all very well to answer that people would not object to Mr. Kipling's verses if they did not object to the opinions expressed



## Mr. Kipling's Later Verse

in them ; but most of his critics, I think, could produce all sorts of things by other men, from the "views" in which they differ quite as much, but which they admire. For me, I find that there are a good many opinions in this book with which I agree ; but I dislike the verses containing them just as much as I do the others. And the reason is that, with the exception of one or two personal poems too intimate to quote, they are not conceived as poetry is conceived and not poetically expressed. Mr. Kipling no doubt feels profoundly, but he seldom gets profound feeling into these opinionative songs. They are, whether polemic or laudatory, rhetorical ; and they are seldom even good rhetoric. They are like leading articles out of the *Globe* run into metre and rhyme ; they have no beauty (without which, of whatever kind, poetry cannot live), and the reader's favourable reaction to them, save very rarely, can be expressed in terms like "that is eloquent" or "that's a good hit." Even the better things are no more than rhetoric. Take, for instance, the lines on France :

*Strictest judge of her own worth, gentlest of  
man's mind,  
First to follow Truth and last to leave old Truth  
behind—  
France, beloved of every soul that loves its  
fellow kind.*

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What are these but an echo of Swinburne, like one of Swinburne's imitations of himself? A man writing genuine poetry would communicate more genuine emotion about the grandeur and pathos of France than Mr. Kipling does in the whole of his perorational poem. Or, again, the address (which squares very ill with Mr. Kipling's frequent insults to Ireland and the Irish race) to the Irish Guards :

*The fashion's all for khaki now,  
But once through France we went  
Full dressed in scarlet Army cloth  
The English—left at Ghent.  
They're fighting on our side to day,  
But, before they changed their clothes,  
The half of Europe knew our fame  
As all of Ireland knows.*

*Old Days ! The wild geese are flying,  
Head to the storm as they faced it before !  
For where there are Irish there's memory  
undying,  
And when we forget, it is Ireland no more !  
Ireland no more !*

It is, though skilled journalism, not as good as Thomas Davis himself would have made it. As a rule what he gives us is sheer leading article. There are two on Ulster, one on the Declaration of London, others on Joseph

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## Mr. Kipling's Later Verse

Chamberlain, the sluggish pre-war England, Mesopotamia and Spiritualists.

He writes about Spiritualism precisely as an intelligent and sensible antagonist would write in the leader columns of the *Daily Telegraph*, dressing up his commonplace argument with a Biblical reference to the Witch of Endor. You get in these works gleams of eloquence, of sense, of wit, of shrewdness, and (arguably) of political and psychological insight: but never of poetic inspiration and seldom of poetic language. Sometimes the deadness of his metrical prose is so astonishingly flat that one wonders a man who is usually at least vigorous could pass anything so banal. For instance, here, in his denunciation of the invaders of Belgium:

*When all was ready to their hand  
They loosed their hidden sword,  
And utterly laid waste a land  
Their oath was pledged to guard.*

*Coldly they went about to raise  
To live and make more dread  
Abominations of old days,  
That men believed were dead.*

or in the extraordinarily feeble collection of epitaphs at the end of which a typical one is this, on a Native Water Carrier with the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force:

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*Prometheus brought down fire to men.  
This brought up water.  
The gods are jealous—now, as then,  
They gave no quarter.*

And sometimes his journalistic lapses are actually funny. There is, for instance, a poem about John Bunyan, whom he alleges (I know not with what authority) to have been a private in Fairfax's army and "a vagrant oft in quod." He says that in *The Pilgrim's Progress* all types of modern wartime doubters, cravens, traitors, etc., are to be found, including what he calls "State-kept Stockholmites"—in serial publication the phrase was "stall-fed Stockholmites," so we have evidence that Mr. Kipling, like other poets, pumice-stones his epithets—a reference, apparently, to Mr. Arthur Henderson. And the final chorus, after all this, begins :

*A pedlar from a hovel,  
The lowest of the low,  
The father of the Novel*

—a statement which may be, though I don't think so, historically defensible, but comes here as the most exquisite of anti-climaxes. Here at least nobody can complain that the diction is the diction of pompous oratory, a charge properly levelled against Mr. Kipling's frequent hotch-potches of "hath's," "ye's," and capital letters.



## A Better Play than Usual

I may make the reservation that *A Nativity* is a beautiful and touching poem, that *A Recantation* is not only that but (there is no room to quote it adequately, *i.e.*, in full) a poem of peculiar originality, and that here and there, as in *Natural Theology*, Mr. Kipling tries to be humorous about mankind in general, instead of his enemies in particular (whom he loathes, or wants to loathe, too much to be funny about them), and succeeds beautifully. But this is a very small proportion of the whole book, which might well drop out of the complete collection of Mr. Kipling's books without being missed. It is difficult to imagine how a man can have printed parts of it; and impossible to imagine how he can have reprinted them.

## A Better Play Than Usual

VERY tardily, I went to see Mr. Drinkwater's play, *Abraham Lincoln*, at the Hammersmith Lyric. The tardiness was nothing unusual; in fact, it was less than usual. Save only for a faithful attendance at whatever suburban performances of Gilbert and Sullivan have been within my reach, I had not been inside a theatre since 1914, when I saw Mr. Barker's production of Mr. Hardy's *Dynasts*. *The Dynasts*, as pre-

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sented at the Kingsway, was therefore still clearly in my mind when I went to Hammer-smith ; and I don't think that it was absent from Mr. Drinkwater's mind. His notion of presenting a sort of film of Lincoln's life in independent scenes, and his manner of sticking to historical record, is strongly reminiscent of the Hardy production ; so also is his plan of linking the scenes up with elocuted choruses. The choruses, however, were not reminiscent of Hardy's ; verse and sentiments were so feeble that they gave one goose-flesh. Mr. Drinkwater would do well to cut out all the moralising and high-flown parts of these interspersed passages and retain only those which explain what has just happened and is about to happen to his hero, and tell us how much time has elapsed.

The play has already been written about in this paper ; and I echo Mr. MacCarthy's praises. I saw—at least I thought I saw—all sorts of defects in characterisation, interpretation, machinery ; from the absence of that humour which always clung about the hero to the fact that the whole seven scenes took place indoors ; from the melodrama of Mr. Hook to the unconvincing and overdone pathos of the condemned sentry, who was so handsome, so brave, spoke such perfect English, and had committed his offence under such extremely palliating circumstances that it

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## A Better Play than Usual

was unbelievable that anyone can have meant to execute him. But the fact remained that my eyes and ears were glued to the actors throughout; that in places I was profoundly moved; that I was as sorry when Lincoln was shot as I should have been had I been present at the event; and that I went away saying that not even the ban on smoking would keep me away from the theatre if there were many plays about which appealed as this one had done to both my intelligence and my emotion. There is no poetry about Mr. Drinkwater's verse choruses, but there is a good deal in his prose-play.

He partially escapes, in fact, the radical defects of the modern theatre. There is an immense amount of interest in the theatre. Books are written about its possibilities; societies are founded to explore and exploit them; everyone hopes that the theatre will in our time be as good as it was in the days of Shakespeare and Æschylus; and thousands of persons with intellects write for the stage. But it is commonly overlooked that Shakespeare and his contemporaries, like Æschylus and his contemporaries, were poets. The witty comedy of manners needs no poetry; in that sphere our age (for instance, in *Arms and the Man* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*) has produced works as amusing and perhaps as permanent as the comedies of

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Sheridan and the writers of the Restoration. But we have produced nothing like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *As You Like It*, and to tragedies like *Prometheus* or *Lear*, or *The Duchess of Malfi*, no age since the Elizabethan has had anything to compare, and our own age has fallen as far short as any. The reason is that our poets do not write for the theatre, and that our playwrights do not try to write poetic drama. When an attempt, not good but respectable, has been made, as it was by Stephen Phillips, audiences respond to it well enough. But usually the attempt is not made ; those moderns who have written for the theatre have been mostly foes of what they call romance, and slaves of theories about "realism" and "types" which have robbed their works of any chance of immediate popularity or prolonged life.

I did not think Mr. Drinkwater's a great play ; but I at least came away from it with a feeling of the greatness and wonder of existence, of the splendour of the human will, of the mystery of good and evil, the magnificence of conflict, the awfulness of death. And I remembered how often before the war I had sat through plays by intelligent men which had bored me, or depressed, or almost distressed me, because those men were either devoid of the poetic imagination, passion and a love of beauty, or because, having these, they

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refused "on principle" to allow them scope. They would invite you to witness in five acts the squalid meals and quarrels of a clerk and his wife in Brixton, into which an acuter pain was introduced by drink, adultery or unemployment. "Realism" was taken to justify occupying a scene or two by showing a young woman in a djibbah reading a Blue-book whilst her obscurantist parent (male always—the mother was docile or secretly sympathetic) asked her what that nonsense was all about. Language approached, at ordinary times, as near as possible to the common colloquial; at times of overwrought feeling the resort was not heightened language, but splutters or dead silences.

There are degrees of cleverness, of conscientiousness, of faithfulness in observation in the typical modern drama; but it is almost all in neutral tints, and gives one the pain, not of a great grief or of a religious experience, but of the toothache or a month in a slum. The best and cleverest of these things interest, but they do not stir. One sees these things; one thinks "this is a respectable effort," or "this is very terse and well-constructed," or "this should show the smug that all is not well with the world," or "this should assist the cause of tuberculosis reform"; but as for the ecstasy of worship, absorption in beauty, exaltation, purgation, colour, music,

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all the splendours of great art of whatever age, period or style—these things are in another world. For a faint approach to them we have to be content with the Paolos and Francescas and the Cyranos; for broad humour we have to go to the music-halls; and the intelligent stage will remain the worthy but pathetic thing that it is until the contemporary mind looks another way, takes a different attitude, and the contemporary heart is allowed the full and free expression of its natural emotions. I know I should be making reservations and qualifications. I am not suggesting that great poets always have dramatic gifts, even in an age when most artists think and feel dramatically. I am not asking that tragedies should be written in verse, though I happen to think that the expression of emotion, when emotion is deepest and fullest, is usually likely to approach the rhythm, as it approaches the imagery, of poetry. I do not forget that our age has contributed new kinds of play to the stage, such as the kind of play that Tchekov wrote and some people like. Nor do I forget that Mr. Yeats, Mr. Masefield and others, with a correct appreciation of what the drama has been and might be, have aimed at bigger things than Mr. Drinkwater has attempted. But I never quite feel that they have done it naturally; I feel that what has been wrong is the general intellectual atmosphere, and that granted that that had been

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right, other men than those might have done far better things than theirs.

### The Tastes of the American Intelligentsia

THE American publishers have, in the past, not been very enterprising about cheap series of books. Our own well-known series—*Everyman's*, the *World's Classics*, etc.—have been imported and freely sold, and there was, I believe, a large market for a “shelf of classics” selected by President Eliot on the lines of the late Lord Avebury's Hundred Best Books. The idea of the cheap series of established books has at last begun to be thoroughly exploited. During the war a firm called Boni and Liveright started a series called “The Modern Library of the World's Best Books”; it caught on immediately, and is having a huge success. The books are very well printed and bound for the price—which began at 60 cents, and in the latest batch to reach me has risen to 70 cents and 75 cents, or about three shillings. But what interests me is the selection of books.

To some extent it is possible (I do not know) that Messrs. Boni and Liveright have been handicapped by American copyrights. But

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their range is wide enough to show what is their taste ; or, perhaps I should say, what they judge to be the taste of the large American public which likes something better, or more pretentious, than the ephemeral novels of the day. There are, in the latest list before me, some seventy-seven "titles." Except for Henry James, Mr. Howells and President Wilson, there is scarcely an American name in the whole table. The publishers are content to ignore the eminent American writers of the nineteenth century ; what they set out to do is to ransack the rest of the world. Oscar Wilde's, *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, and Strindberg's *Married*, are Nos. 1 and 2 ; *Soldiers Three* and *Treasure Island* follow ; and the next authors in sequence are Mr. Wells, Ibsen, Anatole France, Maupassant, Nietzsche, Dostoievsky, Maeterlinck, Schopenhauer and Samuel Butler. *Diana of the Crossways* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* flank one of Mr. Shaw's novels, and Mr. Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* ; Gilbert's *Plays* are cheek by jowl with *Ann Veronica* and *Madame Bovary* ; Francis Thompson's *Poems* are followed by a novel by Schmtzler ; and with Nos. 49 and 50 we come to the delicious collocation of Max Stirner and Max Beerbohm, the two Max.

The names are very varied, and at first sight it seems difficult to draw any deductions



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whatever from them. Yet, on closer inspection, a few facts stick out. For instance when one comes across such a name as that of Mr. Chesterton one is faintly surprised to find it there. It is quite properly included in every series of good and celebrated authors, yet one is surprised. Why? Because of something in the surrounding atmosphere; one feels that the dominant elements in it are positively alien to him; that he would dislike nine-tenths of the authors by whom he is here surrounded. Again, certain names recur. Which are they? They are few, but they include Wilde, Strindberg, Nietzsche, Maupassant. Only one of the foremost nineteenth-century English poets comes in: that poet is Swinburne. There are two artistic portfolios: of these one contains reproductions of Aubrey Beardsley's drawings. Mid-nineteenth century literature outside England is represented, I think, only by *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil* and Schopenhauer's *Studies in Pessimism*. There is only one eighteenth-century book, and that is Voltaire's *Candide*; there is only one book of yet earlier date, and that is a volume of François Villon. Mr. W. L. George's *A Bed of Roses* is deemed worthy of a place with the masterpieces of Balzac and Turgenev, and space is found amongst the seventy-seven classics for the *Complete Works of Ernest Dowson*.

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Now there are undoubtedly many masterpieces in this Modern Library, but it cannot really be called catholic. It is tendencious. It is constructed for a particular generation and a particular place. "Do not," says the publishers' exhortation, "be a Stagnuck." What that means I do not know, though I sincerely hope that I am not one and shall never become one. But the sentence that follows is more comprehensible: "People are judged by the books they read." If young America is reading the Modern Library, and the Modern Library is suited to young America, we may form some opinion as to the state of mind of young America. Why are Voltaire and Villon, very great writers, selected rather than their equally great contemporaries, predecessors and successors? They are the only two pre-1800 authors who have so far been considered worth reprinting, and it can only be deduced that there is in them something that peculiarly appeals to the readers of the majority of the modern authors here included. Voltaire was subversive and slightly indecent and played with ideas; Villon got drunk, like Ernest Dowson, and used bad words. Chaucer used equally bad words, but he did not blaspheme like Voltaire or ruin himself with excesses like Villon, so it would be useless to expect an interest in him, or in Dr. Johnson, or in Lamb, or in Keats; even Montaigne is probably ruled out for lack of eccentricity. No doubt

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as the Library expands some of these will be added; but I do think that a survey of the first batch suggests that intellectual America has got "modernism" worse than we ever had it. And I use the word of that tendency to think that art and thought began yesterday; that all history before yesterday left us only a few relics worth preserving in the shape of books which were "modern" before their time; that the most foolish question is better than the most sensible answer; that a thing is necessarily great if nobody has ever said it, or thought it worth saying, before; that anything which is abnormal must be good; that to be happy is a crime; and that nothing is interesting unless it is bizarre and preferably violent. They have just discovered in America that respectability is a terrible thing, and they are going for it with that rather naïve and charming enthusiasm that they throw into all their campaigns.

I pick up again the book of poor Ernest Dowson. He is, the publisher explains on the wrapper, "one of the few poets of the naughty nineties who have survived the imperial discriminating taste of those ultimate connoisseurs, the Years. While others of the group which made a decade of decadents have silently folded their purple tents and gone with the wind, Dowson has steadily emerged towards the foreground in critical

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and popular opinion. The fire of this tragic poet was too intense and true to allow itself to burn away in grotesqueries and aperies. He has added some of the very finest lyrics of the nineteenth century to English verse." "The naughty nineties"! Ugh! But "the fire of this tragic poet"! He is not even violent; he is not even shocking; he is not even odd. He did write one or two lyrics in which his feelings got through and he made an original music, but most of his work is a wilderness of weary prettinesses. He may have meant what he said, but if so he contrived to write precisely like the people who did not mean what they said. His writing is Swinburne's decayed and gone thin; the late Richard Middleton's shows the process of degeneracy gone one stage farther. Why do they reprint him? It must be because he was weak and unfortunate.

## The Attacks on Mr. Bridges

**T**HERE is (August, 1919) a coal crisis. The Victory Loan was not a success. Unemployment and unemployment pay are rife. No solution has yet been produced for the Irish problem. The Peace settlement is not yet rounded off. Koltchak is retreating, our Army at Archangel is to be

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withdrawn, and we have to make up our minds about our future attitude towards the *de facto* Government of Russia. The situation in India is not all that could be desired; relations between Japan and China are strained; everything is puzzling and nothing is satisfactory. But in a ruined and distracted world some of our political guides still manage to find time to think of matters less urgent and not bearing either upon international relations or our industrial system. Popular newspapers, the latest I think being the *Evening News*, have been inquiring persistently what was happening to the Poet Laureate, and on Wednesday the following dialogue took place at question-time in the House of Commons :

“ Mr. BONAR LAW, answering Mr. BOTTOMLEY (Hackney, S., Ind.), who asked whether the Poet Laureate had up to the present written any Peace ode or other poem commemorative of Britain's part in the war; and, if so, whether a copy would be supplied for the use of members, said : As far as I am aware, the answer to the first part of the question is in the negative; the second part does not, therefore, arise.

“ Mr. BOTTOMLEY : Is the right hon. gentleman aware that part of the remuneration of the Poet Laureate consists in a cash payment in lieu of a supply of Canary wine, and will

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the right hon. gentleman consider the desirability of paying that part of the salary in kind on the off-chance of his getting inspiration ? (Laughter.) Mr. BONAR LAW : Before I answer that suggestion I must ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which would cost the country more. (Renewed laughter.) ”

I don't know how far the versatile Mr. Bottomley was serious in his first inquiry ; possibly it was only a preparation for his second, to which I am sure that no honest bard would take exception. But I think that the newspaper critics who are continually demanding ceremonial verses from the Laureate should think out their position before complaining.

As a matter of fact, Dr. Bridges—though it would be unreasonable to expect Mr. Bonar Law to know it—has not been mute on the subject of the war. I remember at least three poems—one very good—in which he struck the notes of patriotism and courage. But what his critics apparently desire is a full-dress ode on all great occasions ; he also, they suggest, should have produced his “ Cenotaph ” on the appropriate day ; sonnets to Marshal Foch, Marshal Haig and the King of the Belgians should have been forthcoming ; and he would only be fulfilling his functions if he did his best to reinforce His Majesty's prose appeal to the nation with an appeal in

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metre and rhyme. They are harking back to the days when no State celebration, no Royal birthday and no national victory occurred without its due Pindarics from the State poet. I wonder if they would like these deliberate compositions if they got them !

Any man skilled in verse can, I need scarcely say, make whenever he chooses confections bearing some of the outward marks of poetry. Dr. Bridges' worst predecessors in office, people like Whitehead and Pye, were always ready to work to order. It is easy. You begin (if the occasion be one of nuptial rejoicings) "All hail th' auspicious Day, The Royal Groom leads forth his Royal Bride, The list'ning Heavens hear a Nation's clamorous Pride." Or, if a conquering general comes home, what more suitable, indeed obvious, than :

*He comes*

*Blow, blow, ye trumpets, roll, ye martial drums,*

with appropriate sentiments strung behind the rhymes "rod" and "God," "price" and "sacrifice." When the late Alfred Austin was P. L. we used to get a certain amount of this sort of thing ; and how did it affect the Press ? The result was that even those who, when he died, favoured the retention of the office, said that it was highly anomalous to expect a man to turn verses out to order.

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Indeed (it was widely and properly argued) if the office continues to exist as a national recognition of the worth and dignity of letters, it is sheer inconsistency and self-frustration to persuade its holder to diminish that dignity by writing when he does not feel inclined. Ceremonial verses written by and for a particular date are journalism. Poetry—we have it on the authority of one of the greatest of Poets Laureate—is the fruit of “emotion remembered in tranquillity.” If a man knows that he must celebrate the Peace on Peace Day his emotions about it are likely to be confused, he is in the nature of things not given time to look back on them, and he will certainly have little tranquillity. The better the poet the less likely he will be to write even tolerable verses even if he attempts to do anything, and the less likely he is also to attempt anything merely because he is expected to. The Laureates who have done the thing with ease, and naturally, have been those who never wrote a good thing, who indeed regarded the stuff of poetry as artificial rhetoric, and its composition as a mechanical art.

That great patriotic poetry is welcome goes without saying. That the office should always be filled by a man capable of it is evident. That it would be preposterous to have a Laureate who did not care whether England sank or swam, and that a man who did care



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would in the natural course of things be sometimes inspired to write on a national theme is also beyond dispute. Dr. Bridges has, in a body of work still not sufficiently appreciated by the wider public, nobly expressed his love of his country. In the finest collection of poems of landscape that any Englishman has written he has left a memorial of that love which will outlast ten thousand Odes on the Peace : it is indeed an impertinence to mention them in such a connection. But I at least am happy to think that not all the criticism and all the Canary in the world would induce such an artist to fake.

Will nothing ever kill the prevalent belief that there is something specially meritorious about commonplaces in verse ? We all feel, usually too deeply to express it at all, immeasurable relief and gratitude at the end of the bloodshed and the outcome of the struggle. We have all said "Thank God it's over." Why should anybody think that if that sentence be carefully twisted round into "We sing with heart and voice Glory to God who gave the victory" that that is poetry and on a totally different plane ? If we want that sort of thing it is no good having the greatest of our living poets, a man of seventy-five, in the Laureateship. We should appoint a leader-writer, or a man who has filled two inches weekly with a humorous poem regularly

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contributed to a paper. There will be the mentality. And the thing should be thoroughly done. If metrical expression is desirable on one great occasion it is desirable on all. The Poet Laureate should work to the calendar, missing no anniversary and giving their meed to all the openings and closings of Parliament, all the unveilings of statues, and all the flotations of national loans. This means a volume of work calling for considerable energy. It would therefore be best to appoint a young, strong man; put the post upon the regular Civil Service Establishment (Home Office or Office of Works) and fix an age limit at which the occupant should retire.

## Rhymed Mnemonics

**S**WELTERING in the heat, languid, thirsty, reluctant to move, still more reluctant to write, I still thanked the blessed sun for his munificence. Ought I not (I wondered) to include St. Swithin? It was fine on Swithin's Day this year; and, though the Saint could scarcely be expected to keep his promise literally, he has been doing his bit. At this point I remembered there was a mnemonic rhyme about him and his promise. I tried to repeat it and could not. As my efforts of memory were inducing a

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dangerous state of heat I referred to a Dictionary of Quotations. Needless to say this did not help me. It told me that John Gay in his *Trivia* (which has given a name to much superior compositions) had observed :

*How, if on Swithin's feast the welkin lours,  
And every penthouse streams with hasty showers,  
Twice twenty days shall clouds their fleeces drain,  
And wash the pavements with incessant rain.*

This passage may be remarkable as containing one of the few sentences in English literature in which the welkin does anything but ring, but nobody would ever use it for a mnemonic ; the general public would not have such pompous couplets at any price.

Unable to recall this mnemonic rhyme, I fell a-thinking of mnemonic rhymes in general. They are, one realises, far more general than one had thought ; and it is a conviction that exhortations and terse truths, or lies, stick better when they are put metrically that has led the modern advertiser—even the Government when it was advertising War Loan—to rely more and more on this effective, if irritating, form of propaganda. I suppose the most universal of all, a rhyme known probably to the majority of people throughout the whole English-speaking world, is that which begins : “Thirty days hath September.” This rhyme

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begins as one's servant and ends by being one's master ; how many of us have the wretched thing ringing in our heads whenever we have to remember a date, long after our common faculties have put us in full possession of the facts ? Weather mnemonics, formerly so common, have, I think, been dying out since we became an urban people ; but that which (I hope accurately) informs us of the various feelings that the shepherd has when he sees a red sky at morning or a red sky at night is still generally current. The Board of Trade itself, I believe, incites mariners to learn the verses about

*Green to green and red to red,  
Perfect safety, go ahead.*

and the corresponding verses for terrene travel are widely known. These, however, appear to me to overreach themselves. It is really far easier to remember to keep to the left than it is to recite, at moments of emergency, lines about being right if you go to the left, and getting left if you go to the right. Mnemonics as an assistance in such cases as this are a burden. One might as well have a rhyme telling one in which hand to hold one's knife. And the deuce of a mnemonic is that once acquired it can never be entirely lost. Either it comes grinding into your head whenever it has a chance or else (as with St Swithin's) its

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## Rhymed Mnemonics

phantom haunts one and one is uneasy until one has disinterred the lost corpse. Most mnemonics are by no means lovable for their own sakes. There are exceptions. The finest mnemonic of all that I have ever heard is that which records the signs of the Zodiac. It runs—at least it runs thus in an imperfect memory :

*The Ram, the Bull, the Heavenly Twins,  
Next the Crab the Lion shines,  
The Virgin and the Scales,  
The Scorpion, Archer, little Goat,  
The Man who holds the watering pot,  
The Fish with glittering scales.*

But this is poetry. It might have come out of Christopher Smart's magnificent *Song to David*; it might have come out of that kindred chant of exaltation, Mr. Ralph Hodgson's *Song of Honour*. Still, if we can get mnemonics which are also good verse, so much the better.

But a full collection of mnemonics in rhyme would make a very large volume. They exist in every sphere of education with which I am acquainted. Possibly (but I don't know) the newest kind of elementary Latin grammars leave them out ; but in my time the rules for gender in Latin, and the exceptions, were all memorised in dreadful jingles on the lines of

*Common are to either sex,  
Artifex and opifex.*

## Books in General

When—I believe it is so no longer—Paley's *Evidences of Christianity* was a compulsory subject in the Cambridge Little Go many men never referred to the work itself. They used a hoary summary compiled in verse about the middle of the last century by a gentleman who had been coxswain of the University Boat. The repulsive exploits of Nero were concluded with a line, "He said it was the Christian men that set the town on fire, sirs," and the way in which Paley's examination of miracles was dealt with may be exemplified by :

*Cardinal de Retz, in Spain,  
Saw a man (as some maintain)  
Had one leg, then had two :  
Paley does not think this true.*

As a series of mnemonics this work was a masterpiece of art, and, in practice, it was very successful ; whether it was calculated to inculcate respect for Paley, for Christianity, or for its evidences is another matter. What other religious mnemonics there may be I know not ; though some are probably current in theological colleges where they have to study and differentiate the early sects. But the physical scientists have hosts of them, which are quite unknown to the general public.

That ancient musical comedy, the *Geisha*, the name of which may be not even a memory

## Rhymed Mnemonics

a generation hence, has left traces which may be permanent in the physical class-rooms. One of its songs (*The Interfering Parrot*) served as a model for a mnemonic rhyme, still widely employed, and quoted in a recent book on X-Rays, recording the history of an electron. There are a whole series of rhymes to assist persons who are making tests. One concerning lead begins "Pb, or not Pb, that is the question" and ends

*And thus the native clearness of solution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale tint of milk ;*

and there is a remarkably feeble pun in a couplet which goes :

*Why, then (I really must be funny),  
'Tis uncle tin, or anti-mony.*

these two metals occurring together. Something better is :

*Aluminous salts give a luminous brightness  
When heated on charcoal, 'tis true.  
But with nitrate of cobalt they lose all their white-  
ness  
And turn to a beautiful blue.*

Maxwell, I think it was, who put the solution of a problem in mechanics into pretty good verse. But the best translation of a problem

## Books in General

is "Q's" conversion of the first proposition of Euclid into a Scots ballad. It begins :

*The King sits in Dunfermline town  
Drinking the blood red wine ;  
" O wha will rear me an equilateral triangle  
Upon a given straight line ? "*

This would do beautifully for a mnemonic. But unfortunately it is longer than the original proposition, and the original proposition is a sight easier to remember. Probably the ethnologists, the philologists, the teleologists, the conchologists and the coleopterists also have their mnemonics. Of these I know nothing ; but, by analogy, I argue that most of them will have four stresses to the line, like most mnemonics and most English popular verse.

## Two Great Wars

THE house I was in contained a bound volume of the *Anti-Jacobin*. It ran from November 20th, 1797, until July 9th, 1798, as a weekly newspaper, and, as the saying goes, it is unnecessary to state that the principal contributors were Canning, Hookham Frere, and Ellis. It was a most readable organ. One feature was a "weekly examiner," which classified the statements



## Two Great Wars

of opposition newspapers in the three categories—"Lies," "Misrepresentations," and "Mistakes." Another was the famous series of satirical poems, which included *The Rovers* and *The Loves of the Triangles*. But what principally struck me was the repetitiveness of history and the durability of journalese. Half the leaders in the paper might have been reprinted during the present—if it is present—war, with scarcely any alteration save the occasional substitution of "German" for "French"; and the phraseology is so "modern" that one is tempted to presume a practice amongst newspapers of buying up the *clichés* of defunct rivals.

I spent hours over the close print and the yellowing paper. Numbers one and two contained little of interest; abuse of France and the sagacious articles about loans versus taxation to which we are accustomed. In number three, however, one came plumb into the middle of an article about Ireland which might almost have appeared yesterday. The Government was blamed for coercion. But what was the Government to do?

"They had beheld illegal associations administering unlawful oaths throughout the country, for the purpose of overthrowing the constitution; they had seen the authority of the state despised, in the disarming of its

## Books in General

soldiery ; they had the warning of revolutionary preparations, in the war-whoop of sedition sounded through the country, in the forging of arms, and the carrying off of the king's military stores."

One gets away from to-day when one finds the Belfast Press denounced as the worst fomenter of sedition, but back again with the peroration :

" . . . if they had tamely suffered a system of disaffection gradually to extend itself over the country, until ripe for action, in preference to crushing the evil in its infancy, by measures of energy suited to the magnitude of the occasion."

A warning (about taxation) lest "under the pretence of relieving the Poor, the burden is disproportionately and unreasonably accumulated on the Rich" brings one to a letter (from Oxford) attacking the French for their infamous infraction of the laws of war in confiscating works of art belonging to occupied countries.

The French throughout are, jointly and severally, "monsters," who wish to "reduce the whole civilised world to one level of degradation and submission."

On February 12th, 1798, there is a robust leader on a War Loan meeting in the City :

## Two Great Wars

“The most numerous meeting ever known, of the opulent citizens of London, publicly assembled in the Royal Exchange (the centre of the Commerce of this great Empire and of Europe), have, by resolutions passed without a dissenting voice, testified their determination to avail themselves of their unexampled resources, in a manner adapted to the exigency of the times, and to the magnitude of the interests which are at stake.”

And then the French say we have no established tradition of English prose ! The rest is equally familiar, particularly the part about all classes subscribing according to their means ; the one sentence that dates being one about the contributions received from “the Menial Servants of Families.” On February 12th, 1798, there is an attack on the pro-French for demanding that “the Emperor of Germany, the Emperor of Russia, the King of England and the Kings of Spain and Prussia should publish to the world the tenour of all secret engagements they have contracted with each other.” There are moments when one feels that *E pur si muove* was a paradox.

The *Anti-Jacobin* assures its reader that the French war-loan, whatever the French may say, lags. The French Government knows that it is done, and is now plotting for a premature peace.

## Books in General

“They have conceived, that if Peace can be spoken of in general terms, without any mention of conditions, the idea will be caught at with avidity.

Yet nobody learns from history's repetitions and, owing to the Germans' blindness, we had to answer the same move in the same stale words last year. I brooded over this; but when I came to a triumphant leader on the Zeebrugge Raid I was startled. The issue was May 28th. The article began :

“The events of the last week have been highly important. The success of the bold and well-planned enterprise at Ostend, while in itself productive of eminent advantage to this country, by the destruction of a work which it will cost the enemy so much time and expense to repair, and by the impediments which it throws in the way of the preparations of their naval armaments, is yet more to be valued as it indicates a system of vigorous hostility on the part of this country. . . . It seems only necessary to state that the harbour of Ostend, which is in great part rendered useless, and the canal of Bruges, which has been totally destroyed by this expedition, formed one of the most important receptacles for the boats and other craft destined for the invasion of this country.

The nests of the pirates had been destroyed ;



## Two Great Wars

the seas would now be safer for our merchant shipping ; the risk of invasion (for which, we are told elsewhere, an army especially skilled in massacre and plunder had been set apart) had been greatly diminished ; and above all the public would be encouraged by the knowledge that the policy of the authorities was aggressive and not merely defensive. The cheers over this enterprise went on for weeks ; and a good deal of satire was expended on the sceptics of the Opposition, who crabbed and minimised its results.

But almost the queerest little paragraph I saw was about a peer, whose soundness was very suspect, and about whom the Opposition Press had been spreading rumours to the effect that the Government had been establishing contact with him. The *Morning Post*, then a Radical organ (accused, in the one place, of having secret communication with the enemy), had published this paragraph :

“ Ministers have, within a few days, made overtures to the Marquis of Lansdowne.”

The *Anti-Jacobin's* comment is “ No. Though we have not the Noble Marquis's authority to contradict this paragraph, we venture to do it notwithstanding.” And it adds that it is cruel of the Opposition thus to break in on “ the solitude of the Hermit of Bowood.” I

## Books in General

avoid deductions or moralisings. But it becomes more and more apparent that if you wish to keep your sense of the freshness of politics it is better not to read history.

### Sir Walter Raleigh

THE Raleigh Tercentenary was fairly adequately celebrated. Mr. Gosse's lecture at the Mansion House was a good one; the war did not prevent meetings in various quarters of the globe; and the Press spared more space than might have been expected. Why have they almost all in recent years began to spell his name Raleigh? "Legh" is no sort of a syllable to our eyes. If it had long been standardised and there were no authoritative alternative one wouldn't object. But Raleigh's widow used "Raleigh" and his own contemporaries rung the changes on several spellings. If we must throw over the traditional spelling we might throw it over for "Rawley," which at least represents the pronunciation; but why throw it over at all? Only because there are people who like to look pedantic even when there is not a pedant's excuse for it. I am sure that it takes them a conscious effort every time they leave out the "i."

## Sir Walter Raleigh

Enough of that. One thing which struck me most about both the orations and the articles, including the interesting essay in the Literary Supplement, was the general absence of quotations from Sir Walter's works. People concentrated on his career as a sailor, as a politician and a courtier, and thought it unnecessary to say more about his writings than that he wrote them—or some of them. The Anglo-American Alliance (or rather Association) largely accounted for this; we had to dwell extensively on the New World, the settlement of which now proves to have been so useful. But the occasion might have been taken of drawing people's attention to the beauties and majesties of Raleigh's verse and prose, even the most hackneyed passages in which are unknown to many intelligent readers.

His verse is uneven in quality and undefined in quantity. So far as I know, but I am open to correction, the critical edition by the Rev. John Hannah, published by Pickering in 1845, still holds the field. It contains almost everything ascribed to Raleigh with any plausibility, and an elaborate commentary which disputes his claims to all the poems save four or five. There is the slightest of evidence for his authorship of the pilgrim ballad beginning :

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*As you came from the holy land  
Of Walsinghame,  
Met you not with my true love,  
By the way as you came?*

*How shall I know your true love  
That have met many one,  
As I went to the holy land,  
That have come, that have gone?*

The argument for his authorship of "If all the world and love were young"—the answer to his friend Marlowe's "Come live with me and be my love"—is rather stronger. The lovely sonnet on *The Faerie Queene* is, happily, his almost unquestionably:

*Methought I saw the grave where Laura lay  
Within that temple, where the vestal flame  
Was wont to burn. . . .*

So also is *The Lie*, thirteen stanzas on the model of

*Say to the Court, it glows,  
And shines like rotten wood;  
Say to the Church, it shews  
What's good, and doth no good:  
If Church and Court reply,  
Then give them both the lie.*

The lines written by him the night before he was executed:



## Sir Walter Raleigh

*Even such is time, that takes on trust  
Our youth, our joys, our all we have. . . .*

are in all the anthologies. So is the beginning of *The Pilgrimage* :

*Give me my scallop-shell of quiet ;  
My staff of faith to walk upon ;  
My scrip of joy, immortal diet ;  
My bottle of salvation.*

But the poem is often truncated ; they stop at the more beatific parts of Raleigh's vision and omit the bitter lines on

*Heaven's bribeless hall,  
Where no corrupted voices brawl ;  
No conscience molten into gold,  
No forg'd accuser bought or sold,  
No cause deferr'd, no vain-spent journey,  
For there Christ is the King's Attorney.*

The King's Attorney whom Raleigh faced on earth was Sir Edward Coke, who conducted the case with infamous brutality.

Raleigh's noblest entire effort in prose was his account of the fight off the Azores, in which his cousin, Sir Richard Grenville, fought his last fight. This narrative is the basis of Tennyson's fine poem ; Tennyson drew from it not merely his details of fact

## Books in General

but his language to such an extent that his poem is in places but a metrical paraphrase. There is, however, a great field for the anthologist in Raleigh's prodigious *History of the World*. There occurs that great passage vindicating the influence of the stars over human destinies :

“ And certainly it cannot be doubted but the stars are instruments of a far greater use than to give an obscure light, and for men to gaze on after sunset ; it being manifest that the diversity of the seasons, the winters and summers, more hot and cold, are not so uncertained by the sun and moon alone, who alway keep one and the same course ; but the stars have also their working therein.

“ And if we cannot deny, but that God hath given to springs and fountains, to cold earth, to plants and stones, minerals, and to the excremental parts of the basest living creatures, why should we rob the beautiful stars of their working powers ? For, seeing they are many in number, and of eminent beauty and magnitude, we may not think that in the treasury of his wisdom who is infinite there can be wanting, even for every star, a peculiar virtue and operation ; as every herb, plant, fruit, and flower adorning the face of the earth hath the like. For as these were not created to beautify the earth alone, and to cover and

## Sir Walter Raleigh

shadow her dusty face, but otherwise for the use of man and beast, to feed them and cure them, so were not these uncountable glorious bodies set in the firmament to no other end than to adorn it, but for instruments and organs of his divine providence, so far as it has pleased his just will to determine."

How simple and natural is this language for all its resounding march; how much better in that place that easy "beautiful" before "stars" than the most recondite, specialised adjective that could have been found; who since Raleigh, but Donne at his best or Jeremy Taylor, could have spoken "and to cover and shadow her dusty face"? The passage is not very well known. The only thing from the *History of the World* that is well known is the great concluding epitaph on ambition and tribute to death which ends—and thus ending, must have echoed in De Quincey's mind when he wrote the most eloquent of his paragraphs on opium—with one of the famous sentences of English prose:

"O eloquent, just and mighty Death! whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised; thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty and ambition

## Books in General

of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, 'Hic jacet !' "

Wolfe, rowing in the dark across the St. Lawrence, said that he had rather have written Gray's *Elegy* than take Quebec. It is the glory of the Elizabethan Age (as perhaps of every great poetic era) that it produced men capable of rivalling either feat. Sir Walter Raleigh was one.

## The Decay of the Novel

**A** PUBLISHER whom I met complained that he could not get any good novels. He could get tolerable novels ; he could get saleable novels ; he could get an infinite number which were neither tolerable nor saleable. But what he wanted—and he was not unique among publishers in feeling this hankering—was novels which were literature, novels by young men which promised still finer novels in the future. "Where," he asked, "are the young men who are going to have the kind of reputation ten or twenty years hence that the most prominent of the elder novelists have now ? Who is going to write novels which will last, or which will influence the intelligent public ?" These were his questions, and I could not



## The Decay of the Novel

answer him. There have been since the war very few first or second novels that have had more than a week's vogue, and of those several were written by people who may not become professional novelists. Ten years ago there was a crop of young novelists (Henry James discussed some of them in a famous article) who may not, as a body, have come to much, but on whom critics and publishers at least pinned hopes. No similar group has succeeded it. A book here and there since then has made a success with the discriminating. But these successes were isolated. And the general tendency of intelligent young men to try their hands at the novel seems to have weakened. Ten years ago if one knew a young man of brains who was beginning to write, the betting was twenty to one that he would try his hand at the novel first, and there was a strong probability that his next attempt would be made on the repertory theatre play. The production of competent, respectable novels has fallen off, and that of novelistic plays has fallen off with it. There has been a change in temperament and in atmosphere: the talented young are writing poetry, lyric poetry. Possibly the large-scale poem and poetic play will follow. At all events, narrative prose is not so universally the fashion as it was.

I do not suppose that the English novel is

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going to die. We have no certainty, of course. The novel is a modern creation. They had a few novels before the birth of the novel as we know it. The later Greeks had novels about lovers and pirates, and very dull they were. The Middle Ages had stories, some of them long enough to be called novels; and if the French romances of the seventeenth century are not admitted to be novels it is certainly not because of any defect in length. People dispute about the novel's origins. There were masses of tales in English (*cf.* the Bibliographical Society's catalogue) before Bunyan, whom Mr. Kipling calls "The Father of the Novel, Salvation's first Defoe," or Defoe, whose claim Mr. Kipling obliquely recognises. But even in Defoe's day the novel was not esteemed as later generations have esteemed it. It was a subsidiary diversion, not an art-form, still less the dominant art-form. Richardson and Fielding hoisted it up, Scott and Dickens put it on its modern pinnacle. Its modern numerical predominance and the quantity of the brains that have been diverted to its service have not been determined altogether by the scope it offers to creative genius. They have been determined by economic demand arising from social change. Universal education has produced the big public; the big public will read stories and nothing else; the novel and the newspaper have ascended together; the novel-

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## The Decay of the Novel

ist is offered financial rewards that no other writer of books can hope to obtain; some money can be made out of almost any publishable novel, and there is fascination in the chance of a big success. No historian, essayist or bard can lie lapt in the beautiful dream of serialisation in America, or half a million sale in the ex-sevenpennies after the dear editions have been exhausted. But economically the novelist's position is likely to weaken a little as the size of the educated public increases. And, so far as the exceptional writer is concerned, it cannot be denied that, however relatively large the demand for novels, there is bound to come a day when he will feel that the time has come to try his hand at something else. In the nature of things the novel can never be exhausted; human nature can never be exhausted. But that a general feeling of staleness should come, if it has not already come—even were it to pass away again—is to be expected. We have had for generations a tremendous output of novels. Convention has succeeded convention. Length has been almost stereotyped. The spell of the established is strong. Fashion has (or seems to have) almost boxed the compass of methods. Novelists find (or appear to find) it difficult to sit down and write as if no one had ever written a novel before. Almost from the mere title a novel can usually be classed as a novel of a certain

## Books in General

school or type. The writer of a novel must often be haunted by the suspicion, as he writes, that he has seen all this sort of thing before; and the more original a man's mind the more likely he is to want to turn his back on a form that everybody has used for generations. I do not suppose it will ever again be considered rather disgraceful to write a novel. Even were the novel out of fashion, the existence of great novels in the canon of literature would prevent that. The epic (*pace* Mr. Noyes's *Drake*) is out of fashion; but it is not considered disgraceful to write epics, for Homer did the thing superbly and it is therefore respectable. But it does seem to me possible, though at the moment every shelf groans with novels, that the novel, as we know it, will be no more permanent than any other art-form or any mechanical device. The tale is as enduring as the walking-stick; but the modern novel is as temporary as the steam-engine.

Please note the reservation. I say the "novel as we know it." I am quite prepared to admit that there are things worth doing that can only be done in a hundred thousand words or more of prose. It is conceivable, I think, that there was truth in the contention of that critic (I think Mr. Abercrombie) who said that the novel began with Thomas Hardy, by which he meant that with Mr.

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## A Friend

Hardy began a new kind of novel. The kind he would (I suppose) say had been carried one stage further by Mr. Conrad, and there may be great figures ahead. This I do not dispute. What I said was that I thought that the stream of intelligent novels had begun to shrink and would go on shrinking, and that the novel would become an intellectual fashion again only when it had markedly changed and the mass of artists had had a rest from it.

This is what I thought when I left the publisher. There are possible answers to it. One is that I may be wrong. The other is that I could not write a novel myself and want to keep myself warm in the outer darkness of that incapacity. Any reader is fully at liberty to make either answer or both. I am not inclined to be very positive on the subject, and even if I were, people would still, alas, think what they pleased.

## A Friend

**I** WAS talking, a week ago, to a collector of books, a veteran with a great collection. The talk turned, as it will on such occasions, to the irrecoverable good old days when a man with a small income could,

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granted knowledge and enthusiasm, form a collection full of rarities. The American millionaires had not come properly into the market. A hundred transatlantic universities were not forming libraries, scouring all the English catalogues, and giving booksellers the assurance of ever-rising prices for early books. Good quarto plays were still procurable for a few shillings when my interlocutor began; minor classics who are now names to conjure with in the salerooms were still unboomed; early volumes of verse were still scattered about of which almost every copy has now found its way to the shelves of some public institution never to emerge again failing the end of our civilization in some ultra-Bolshevist revolution or an invasion from Mars. I was not quite so regretful as my friend. I found consolation in the fact that for every author who is put out of reach of the impecunious book collector, another author comes into his sphere of action. Fifty years ago you might pick up, or buy cheap in an auction room, a Herrick or a Lovelace, but the Caxtons were already expensive and, for the most part, labelled and shelved. To-day, if the *Hesperides* costs £130, and there is small likelihood of unrecorded copies coming to light, the poor collector has only to move his attention a half-a-century forward and he may still discover Restoration and Queen Anne and Georgian rarities, purchasable in

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out-of-the-way shops for a few shillings; books some of which fetch their pounds in the salerooms but which have not yet been hunted for with searchlights, as they will be when the last of the Carolines has found its way into a museum. And Victorian first editions are still lurking in plenty in the corners of provincial shops.

So did we put the best face on things and console ourselves for the fact that we could no longer, as Charles Lamb could do, find first editions of the *Anatomy* on barrows, or get a great folio of plays at the price of a new pair of shoes. We reminded ourselves of "A," who had recently got *Lamia* and *Endymion* for two shillings, and "B," who found Shelley's juvenile novels in the penny box at Wandsworth. But we had exaggerated even the difficulties of finding the earlier and more sought-after books. The collector of genius can still find them.

For I heard next day of a death; a life, short as lives go; and a friendship, old as friendships go, had ended. I will not mention his name here; it would not be known. He had published nothing. He had spent his working life learning, and the one manuscript he left complete was a modest bibliography of a college library. It will be published, and the little world of bibliographers will learn

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that a man, for his years rarely skilled in their lore, has died, and that in his maiden and modest research he made a few discoveries, in a narrow area, which generations of librarians had missed. And he had a genius for the collection of books.

His library was small as libraries go: a few hundreds of old volumes. But all of them he had "found." He united a wide knowledge which often enabled him to spot a book which to the ignorant bore no obvious clue to its nature, no obvious indication of its exceptional interest, with something which one could only call instinct, which often led him straight to the only shelf in a shop which contained anything worth looking at. I remember a few things casually. On a barrow in the Whitechapel-road, the stock of which had all passed through the salerooms, he found a beautiful large black letter, a Pynson with the most delightful woodcuts, one of the most agreeable of early sixteenth century English books. Three times in as many months he found in three several shops, and purchased for a couple of shillings a piece, fine copies of another book which has scarcely ever come into the salerooms and which has fetched nearly £20 when it has done so. Here it was a question of his out-of-the-way knowledge—the book's value is under the surface—against the bookseller's lack of it. I have



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gone into a shop in Bloomsbury with him and seen him, in a languid, careless way, mount a ladder to a top shelf and bring down, with impassive face, three rare little black letter volumes of the Statutes (I think) of Henry VIII., one of which was not—at least in perfect condition—in the British Museum. If he went away for the week-end it was the normal thing to ask him when he came back whether he had found a book shop and what he had got there; the usual and expected answer being that he had dropped into one, or a furniture shop with a shelf of books, for five minutes, and bought (I give a few instances) the folios of Donne's Sermons, including the very rare third volume, for a matter of shillings, or a perfect Herbert, or a fine early North's *Plutarch*. He went to Dublin, and after a day or two I received from him a charming little incunable Claudian from Parma (he took but a passing friendly interest in early foreign printing) for which he had given half-a-crown; and from under the noses of the most respectable and knowing booksellers of Oxford and Cambridge he bore off, for next to nothing, volumes for which I am certain I should have had to pay, or to decline to pay, pounds. The most churlish, secretive and suspicious of booksellers would, at first sight, allow him into their hidden stores and cellars, where he would (his hand usually flying to the right thing spontaneously) unearth

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books stowed away and forgotten thirty years ago. As it happened none of the greatest and most valuable books came his way during the few years of his hobby ; but one always felt he was " liable " to secure even the proverbial Mazarin Bible or a First Folio. He made one feel that rare books were as common as blackberries.

He was not a recluse, or an eccentric, or a stooping bookworm. He did not see life through books ; until his last illness he did his job, pulled his oar, drank his bottle, looked at the earth and the sky. The pursuit of the odd and scarce book, of the false collation, the printer's error, the unknown edition, the fragment at the binding's back, were an amusement in health and a consolation in sickness ; done with thoroughness and immense enjoyment, but not taken more seriously than they should be. But he liked books. He spent a great deal of his leisure on them. He read catalogues at breakfast, rectified entries in works of reference at lunch, usually carried something in vellum or old calf wherever he went ; and had a life of moneyed ease been his lot he would have found his chief occupation in the discovery, examination and proper arrangement of our old poets. With such toys do we amuse ourselves during our brief passage between birth and death, knowing that the shadow is over us and that we can

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take nothing to the grave. And, for so we are made, I think that even at the last, when life in retrospect seemed no longer than a day, and the door into dark mystery was open wide, he would, looking back for the last time, have wished, if it were possible, that some memory of his brief researches among books should be preserved, and that a friend should commemorate him in no other way than this.











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